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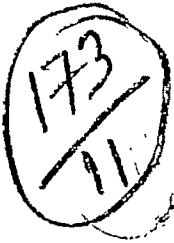
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AMALENDU BOSE



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# THE ROMANTIC NOTE IN ELIZABETHAN CRITICISM

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VISVANATH CHATTERJEE

## I

While the literature of the Elizabethan age is generally regarded as 'romantic', the literary criticism of the period is generally supposed to be 'classical'. But Elizabethan criticism is not without its romantic traits just as Elizabethan literature is marked by a number of classical qualities. As a matter of fact, 'classical' and 'romantic' are terms of convenience which have to be used with caution. They are, at most, temporary formulae. They have to be carefully used as delicate instruments, not roughly handled as tools. 'Classical' and 'romantic' are antithetical to a great extent, but they are by no means mutually exclusive. As G. Gregory Smith points out in his 'Introduction' to the *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, "if we look for a too strong antithesis, and certainly if we expect exclusiveness for the one or the other, the distinction must entirely fail as a critical instrument." (page lx)

Classicism and Romanticism are often found co-existing not only in the same period but also in the same writer. The case of the 'classical' critic Aristotle is in point here. His famous critical doctrine of *mimesis* is an apposite example. Is not Aristotle's mimetic process, by and large, as 'esemplastic' in its essence as the 'Romantic' Coleridge's Secondary Imagination? M.H. Abrams seems to miss this point when he says that in traditional criticism from Plato until the eighteenth century the mind had been a mirror, a reflector of external objects, whereas for the Romantics it became a lamp, a radiant projector. It is pointed out that the poet's "personal faculties, feelings, or desires are not called on to explain the subject matter or form of a poem."<sup>1</sup> This is hardly tenable, since it is evident from a thorough study of Aristotle's *Poetics*, that he looks upon the poet as fundamentally 'a maker'. The term 'imitation', which is an unsatisfactory but perhaps unavoidable translation of Aristotle's *mimesis*, tends to confuse the critical issue involved. Aristotle could never mean 'imitation' in the usual sense of the modern term; he meant something entirely different. Aristotle's concept had nothing to do with any kind of realism or naturalism (such ideas developed only at a much later stage in the history of criticism). He did not suggest any photograph-like reproduction of reality on the

part of the poet. The poet, according to Aristotle, recreates life, and Sidney could see this point clearly enough when he explained the Aristotelian Mimesis as "a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth".<sup>3</sup> The poet re-presents life by re-presenting it, and he can re-present it in his own personal way—the only way possible for him. In other words, the poet re-presents life as it is coloured by his "personal faculties, feelings, or desires". Moreover, Aristotle has explicitly stated that the tragic poet "idealizes" his characters. When the tragic poet does that, does not his mind become a 'lamp' rather than a 'mirror'?

## II

So Aristotle, the apostle of classicism, and Coleridge, the prophet of romanticism, are, if not 'kindred spirits', not at least poles apart from each other. Similarly, Longinus, notwithstanding his classical attempt to reduce sublimity to rigid formulae, had enough of romanticism in him to inspire an English historian of criticism to use the label 'the first romantic critic' for him.<sup>3</sup> Longinus indeed pointed the way to the *furor poeticus* of a romantic movement.

And as with literary critics, so with literary artists. One has only to think of the intensity of Dido's passion for Aeneas to be aware of the romantic element of the classical Virgil. Likewise such gnomic utterances as Edgar's 'ripeness is all' and Hamlet's 'readiness is all', Hellenic ideas expressed in Hellenistically succinct style, are a powerful reminder of the classicism of the romantic Shakespeare. It may be noted here, incidentally, that the eighteenth-century German critic, Lessing, proved, in his own way, that Shakespeare was a follower of Aristotle.<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth, the arch-priest of English Romanticism, often championed (as for instance, in 'Laodamia') the cherished classical ideals of frugality and moderation. When he defended the 'experimental' poems of his *Lyrical Ballads* in the 'Advertisement' appended to the first edition of the book in 1798, Wordsworth had recourse not to any 'romantic' argument but to a patently classical one. He first appealed to nature, and claimed that his 'attempts' should not be judged by a narrow definition of poetry but by truth to nature. He claimed that he was in the great English tradition of 'the best models of composition'—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton—and he appealed to the educated tastes of his readers for proper appreciation of the seriousness of his endeavours.

One could go on multiplying instances, but enough has been said to establish the point of the co-existence of classicism and romanticism. As Victor Hugo said in his Preface to *Cromwell*: "All things

are connected." I believe that the romantic qualities of the English critics of the Renaissance are quite conspicuous but they have not yet been sufficiently recognized. J.E. Spingarn, in his *Literary Criticism of the Renaissance*, discusses the romantic elements in French literary criticism rather sketchily and perfunctorily, while the romantic elements in English criticism he dismisses summarily in less than two pages. There is, of course, the sixth section of Gregory Smith's Introduction to his edition of the *Elizabethan Critical Essays* entitled 'The Romantic Qualities', but this brief section is more concerned with general remarks than specific instances. Moreover, with Smith, Daniel seems to steal the show. The cases of other critics go mostly by default. It is time we set the records straight.

A comprehensive study of the romantic aspects of Renaissance English criticism is necessarily beyond the scope of this brief essay. Still an attempt can be made to have a fresh view of the subject after a lapse of about three score years and ten. (Gregory Smith's 'Introduction' was written in 1903.) It need hardly be pointed out that an adequate consideration of the romantic qualities of the literary criticism of the Renaissance—so declaredly classical—may give us a better clue to its nature. Since Sidney is the greatest and most representative Elizabethan critic, I propose to discuss here his romantic traits.

### III

Love or beauty is generally associated with romanticism and this is one of the outstanding features of the Renaissance. He is "naturally amorous of all that is beautiful", says Sir Thomas Browne,<sup>5</sup> and in these words Browne is echoing the sentiments of a majority of the Renaissance writers, from Edmund Spenser to Benjamin Jonson. When Lyly chooses *Euphues* for the title of his *magnum opus*, he reveals the same trait. The love of beauty is writ large in Renaissance English criticism. And this love takes all conceivable forms, beauty being discovered as much in the streaks of the tulip as in the mind of man. It could never be more brilliantly set forth than in the eloquent words of Sidney, whose "virtuous enthusiasm" (the phrase is Shelley's) for moral beauty haunted him like a passion. Contrary to the popular misconception, the romantic artist does not believe in "art for art's sake". He often has an ethical bias and a moral axe to grind. No less a poet than Shelley, romantic to the tips of his fingers, has made it plain on a number of occasions. Recall, for a moment, the note he appended to his *Hellas*: "It is the province of a poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity." It is these ideas, which exalt and ennoble humanity, that are Sidney's primary concern, and it

is these ideas that he tends to discover in great works of art and literature. It may be pertinent here to notice the Cyrus passage which Sidney brings in to illustrate his memorable statement, "Her Nature's] world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" :

And that the poet hath that idea is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he hath imagined them. Which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air : but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency, as Nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.

(*Apology for Poetry*, p.6)

It is not for nothing that Shelley felt so akin to Sidney (described in *Adonais* as 'sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot') and had Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* as his model when he wrote his own *Defence of Poetry*.

Sidney's moralistic bias—a quality he shares with almost all the Renaissance critics—may be explained with reference to Horace and Gosson. It is, however, much more than that, being an expression of his 'passion to reform the world', to 're-mould it nearer to the heart's desire', if you like—a passion he has in common with Shelley, and perhaps, if it be not too flippant to say so, with the Almighty Creator Himself :

The eternal spirit's eternal pastime...

Shaping, re-shaping.

Time and again, Sidney emphasizes the 'virtue-breeding' quality of poetry. It is a fact already noted that Sidney has to make out a case against Gosson but it is also a fact that Sidney is imbued with the reformist's zeal. Horace's advocacy of the combination of *utile* and *dulce*—and Horace's own occasional preference for *utile* can be read between the lines of *Ars Poetica*—had a tremendous influence on Renaissance English criticism. Yet the arguments in Elizabethan criticism in favour of the moral value of poetry—from Roger Ascham and William Webbe to Thomas Nash and Francis Meres—are too eloquent and impassioned to be a rehash of Horace. The Renaissance English critics were idealists who saw visions and dreamed dreams—like the typical romanticist they were inspired by a vision of a better world than this, a brave new world which was certainly more than a fantastic utopia or 'never-never-land' of fairy-tales.

#### IV

As in life, so in letters, Sidney stands head and shoulders above

his contemporaries. It is no wonder that we find in his criticism such a marked expression of the romantic temper. What is romanticism in its essence but liberality, and where can we find more liberality than in the writings of Sir Philip, described by Fulke Greville as 'the wonder of the age', the same Fulke Greville who wrote his own epitaph—'Fulke Greville, Servant to Queen Elizabeth, Counsellor to King James, and Friend to Sir Philip Sidney'? Liberality, as defined by the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, is free giving, munificence, freedom from prejudice, breadth of mind, and all these qualities Sidney possessed, and possessed abundantly. It is this freedom from prejudice, this breadth of mind, which bursts forth in that magnificent paean in praise of *Chevy Chase* :

Certainly I must confess my own barbarousness : I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet ; and yet it is sung but by some blind crowder, with no rougher voice than rude style ; which being so apparelled in the dust and cobwebs of that uncivil age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar ?

(*Apology for Poetry*, p. 23)

The romantic significance of the passage becomes intensified for us when we take into account the autobiographical factor. It is possible that Sidney had in mind a particular incident connected with his return journey from Oxford, about 1570 when he was still in his salad days. Marshall records that on Sunday, September 8th, he gave 12d. 'by Mr. Phillip's commandment to a blind harper, who was in the service of Sir William Holles'.

Ballad poetry was the Cinderella of the Muses and no critic of those days would ever dream of waxing eloquent in its favour. It was only a bold, romantic spirit like that of Sidney which would ever dare do such a thing. Sidney's eulogy of *Chevy Chase*, from the conventional Renaissance viewpoint, was not only 'unclassical' but also 'uncritical'. And Sidney must have been surprised at his own temerity and seems to confess as much when he refers to his own 'barbarousness'. I think this bears a striking resemblance to a similar situation in the English critical scene about a couple of centuries later when Dr. Johnson screwed his courage to the sticking place and defended Shakespeare's violations of the sacrosanct dramatic unities in the *Preface* to his edition of Shakespeare—rightly hailed as a remarkable piece of forward-looking criticism in an age still enslaved by classical bonds. Like other scholars of the day, Sidney was brought up on the great classics of Greece and Rome. He gave his days and nights to the philosophy of Plato, the poetic theories of Aristotle and Horace, and

the poetry of Homer and Virgil. Even then there is little of servility in his criticism. He tried his best to keep an open mind. No slavish follower of dogmatic ancient theories, he could pay Chaucer the most glowing tribute :

Chaucer, undoubtedly, did excellently in his *Troilus and Cressida* ; of whom, truly, I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age walk so stumblingly after him.

(*Apology for Poetry*, p. 37)

Sidney's literary manner bears the romantic impress on less than his subject matter. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the most important thing about Sidney's *Apology* is not what is said but how it is said. The gusto with which Sidney writes contributes a great deal towards its charm, and this gusto is of the same kind that we find in the great prose writers of the Romantic Revival—Hazlitt and Lamb. Apollo's garden was Sidney's familiar haunt and he had the power of communicating his own appreciation of poetry—"this heart-ravishing knowledge" (ibid, p.4)—to others. 'Heart-ravishing'—what a fine epithet, and how mightily does it touch a sensitive chord in our own hearts ! No dry-as-dust neo-classicist, no rigid formalist, could ever coin such a Keatsian compound ! Only a romanticist, who looks upon fine phrases with the eyes of a lover, is capable of such lovely language. Examples are many, but one more would suffice for the present. When replying to those who object to the use of rhyme and verse in poetry, Sidney uses the word 'music', and immediately follows a parenthesis (it seems, as if, this gushes forth from his heart) : 'music, I say, the most divine striker of the senses'. What a parenthesis ! Unless Sidney had preferred "the original chaos of human nature" (to translate a phrase of A.W. Schlegel's) to the "anatomical ideas which have been stamped as rules", he would have been quite incapable of such *feliciter audax* or happy valiancy of style. But the poet who could be voluble with eloquence could also be mute with reticence, for rightly does this "warbler of poetic prose" know that "Poesy must not be drawn by the ears : it must be gently led, or rather it must lead." (ibid, p.37)

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## THE LOVE THEME IN OTWAY'S *VENICE PRESERVED*

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BHUPENDRA NATH SEAL

When Otway wrote *Venice Preserved* the satirical spirit in politics was high. It resulted from the ideological differences between the Whigs and the Tories and the political furore caused by the Popish Plot in England. No wonder therefore that Otway's *Venice Preserved* can be significantly studied with reference to the political milieu of his time. But Otway's strength does not lie in politics which, however, serves as a very useful background to the play. Politics, of course, stimulates the actions of the principal characters and sows discord in their lives, especially in the case of Jaffeir and Belvidera, whose love story strikes a new note in English drama. Otway's consummate skill in portraying the variegated aspects of love certainly raises him high among the few tragic writers of his age and links him with his great predecessors of the Elizabethan-Jacobean age. It is not for politics, which lost much of its piquancy afterwards, that *Venice Preserved* was frequently revived on the English stage till the middle of the nineteenth century. Love is one of the main reasons why the play has been extolled as 'the best out of Shakespeare'.<sup>1</sup> Love constitutes the principal element by which Otway charmed his own audience as well as posterity. The importance of love in *Venice Preserved*, however, has to be seen in the perspective of Restoration tragedies in general. As J.E. Cunningham has rightly pointed out: 'The great weakness of the play is the one that was fundamental to the whole of Restoration tragedy. Tragic plays depend upon clear notion of human fate, of a power outside and above us, shaping our ends, rough-hew them how we will. The Restoration dramatists were not quite classical enough to call it Nemesis... They fell back upon the one powerful force which bears least examination on the stage—Love'.<sup>2</sup> The root of Otway's tragedy lies in love.

A significant fact about *Venice Preserved* is that there is hardly any love interest in Abbe de Saint Real's *Le Conjurateur des Espagnoles contre la Republique de Venice en l'annee*, Otway's source for his plot. There was sentimentality in the air and Otway could not help turning Jaffeir's problem into a conflict of love and honour. That he had to arrange a role for Mrs. Elizabeth Barry, main actress of his plays,

is secondary. The primary factor is that unless there were a heroine in the play, it could not be made emotional enough. There must be something more intimate and intense than friendship or honour to satisfy Otway and his age; and so the introduction of Belvidera as Jaffeir's wife was almost inevitable.

The interest of the play hinges on the lives of two lovers—Jaffeir and Belvidera—who are not modelled on any figures of political history. (Hence the play cannot be described as a political play.) Neither they have any exact counterparts as mentioned earlier, in the case of Belvidera, in the story of the Abbe Saint Real. As the play opens we get the idea that all is not well with the state of Venice where peace is disturbed by political turmoil. But love breathes life into this dry world of politics, which, however, takes its heavy toll of the lovers' lives.

Otway's Jaffeir and Belvidera are romantic lovers who appear in the beginning as partners of each other's soul. Otway, like Shakespeare, makes his audience feel the soul-absorbing impact of romantic love. When Jaffeir boldly refutes the charges of Priuli, the Venetian Senator who accuses Jaffeir of seducing and stealing his daughter, Belvidera, Jaffeir reveals the truth to the old Senator that he has neither stolen nor seduced Belvidera; but he has won her by the witchcraft of love. He reminds Priuli how he saved Belvidera's life in the past. He makes Priuli remember the incident when Priuli, accompanied by the Duke, sailed to the sea to see the Adriatic; and the unskilful pilot dashed them upon a rock. Then he rescued Belvidera from drowning by plunging instantly into the sea:

When instantly I plung'd into the sea,  
And buffeting the billows to her rescue,  
Redeem'd her life with half the loss of mine.  
Like a rich conquest in one hand I bore her,  
And with the other dash'd the saucy waves  
That throng'd and press'd to rob me of my prize:  
I brought her, gave her to your despairing arms.  
Indeed you thank'd me; but a nobler gratitude  
Rose in her soul: for from that hour she lov'd me  
Till for her life she paid me with herself.

(Act I, i, 42-52)

Otway naturally recalls here Shakespeare's description of Othello's wooing of Desdemona. Belvidera's love, like that of Desdemona, was kindled by imagination out of which springs romantic love. It can be significantly pointed out that often in the course of the play both Jaffeir and Belvidera, as they face estrangement in their relation, cast lingering looks on the days when their love was in its spring. They

remain ever discontented with their present and eagerly long for the past. The memory of the past makes them suffer from self-inflicted pain. The memory of love when its warmth fades raises in both Jaffeir and Belvidera constant feverish agitation. They have not learnt that the secret of happiness lies in remembering only the pleasant experiences of the past and forgetting the unpleasant ones—a point which Elizabeth makes to Darcy towards the end of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

In the beginning Jaffeir's love for Belvidera has also the intensity of the soul. His love is too deep to be shaken by Priuli's vilifications. Jaffeir confesses to Priuli :

You use me thus, because you know my soul  
Is fond of Belvidera : You perceive  
My Life feeds on her, therefore thus you treat me.

(Act I, i, 82—84)

Jaffeir's love for Belvidera is independent of any thought of return. He bravely declares to Priuli :

I lov'd her for her self,  
Not as the Heiress of the great Priuli.

(Act I, i, 101—102)

Love is an infinite passion with them for which their finite hearts yearn and pine away. The following utterance of Jaffeir, to whom love is ever the best comfort, affirms the truth how love fortifies the lives of passionate lovers against the turns of unknown fate.

Oh Belvidera ! Oh she is my wife  
And we will bear our wayward Fate together  
But ne're know comfort more.

(Act I, i, 126—129)

Love is the essence of Belvidera. It makes her shine in all her singular beauty. Her vows of love have the authentic ring of real life and sometimes recall Elizabeth Barrett Browning's protestations of her deep passion for Robert Browning. Belvidera regards herself as wondrously rich if love be treasure. Her nature is too tender and frail. But love makes her voluble ; and Otway, the poet-dramatist, rightly makes impassioned rhapsodies on the expressions of her deep passion for Jaffeir :

If Love be Treasure, wee'l be wondrous rich :  
I have so much, my heart will surely break with't ;  
Vows cannot express it, when I wou'd declare  
How great's my Joy, I am dumb with the big thought,  
I swell, and sigh, and labour with my longing.

(Act I, i, 370-375)

Throughout the play Belvidera languishes for want of love. Her expressions of love are never free from a kind of nostalgia which, in classical phrase, may be described as 'bitter-sweet'. Belvidera is the incarnation of gentle conjugal love. Her love is contrasted in the drama with the study of abnormal sex in the scene of Antonio, the old lecher and Aquilina, the courtesan. Her love shows a deeply physical attachment. Jaffeir longs for Belvidera's limbs which are 'framed for the tender offices of love'. Belvidera thinks of being alone with Jaffeir in a desert where she could throw her arms about him and 'give loose to love'. Even when she is threatened to be killed by Jaffeir she reminds him of their past nights when their stringed hearts leaped to meet each other and melting kisses sealed their lips. The following utterance of Jaffeir to his wife illustrates not only the intensity of their attachment but also remarkably anticipates Browning's experience in the Roman Campagna. Browning learns that whole centuries of folly, noise and sin are not to be weighed against that moment when we realize that love is supreme :

No, th'art my soul itself ; wealth, friendship, honour,  
 All present joys, and earnest of all future,  
 Are summ'd in thee : methinks, when in thy arms  
 Thus leaning on thy breast, one minute's more  
 Than a long thousand years of vulgar hours.  
 Why was such happiness not given me pure ?

(Act IV, I, 84-89)

The love which Otway depicts in *Venice Preserved* is ruined love. It grows romantically and meets a pathetic end after passing through sorrowful courses. Soon after the first act Jaffeir appears as a distracted lover. His love suffers after his involvement in the political events of Venice. Mistreated by Priuli, led by wordly want, Jaffeir is determined to execute his noble rage against the weak and demoralized Venice, against base Priuli's tyranny. He fully agrees to the plot of Pierre, his dear friend, and takes his pledge with him to overthrow the corrupt state of Venice—where 'there's no Trust no Truth'. From the world of love Jaffeir is led to the night-world of conspiracy where dark deeds are done better. Yet love continues to redeem Jaffeir's life as it still remains the guiding principle and the only solace of his life which faces constant tug of war between love and revenge. Thoughts of revenge against the corrupt senators surge in upon him. But his love for his dear wife primarily leads him to take up his arms against the senators of Venice. The sufferings of Belvidera are too much for him to bear. So he boldly swears before his friend, Pierre, who speaks of Belvidera's sufferings under Priuli :

By sea and Air ! by Earth, by Heaven and Hell,  
I will revenge my Belvidera's tears !

(Act I, i, 298-300)

But deeper involvement in political events of Venice alienates Jaffeir from his dear wife. As a lover he becomes inconstant on occasions and oscillates between love for his wife and love for his friend. The result is that he sinks gradually as a lover. At times love is no longer with him a durable fire. But Jaffeir is never free from love's romantic anguish. The love which Otway depicts does not have in it the ideal of unalterable steadfastness which Shakespeare extols in a famous sonnet. Himself a victim of unrequited love, Otway felt the constant pain of his heart-struck injury. His hopeless passion for Mrs. Elizabeth Barry was so overwhelming and soul-killing that while discussing his love theme I am naturally led to think of his sad experiences which clouded his vision. It might not therefore be too fanciful to relate this personal element to explain the tragic end of Jaffeir's love for Belvidera. As the play proceeds Jaffeir's role as a political contriver becomes very important. Yet it may be pertinently pointed out that Jaffeir never ceases to be a tragic lover. Such passionate utterance to Belvidera instantly reveals, how Jaffeir's heart is torn asunder by love :

O Belvidera, double I am a beggar,  
Undone by Fortune, and in debt to thee.

(Act I, i, 384-385)

In the poem, *One Word More*, Robert Browning has spoken of the two soul-sides of men—one to face the world with and the other to show a woman when he loves her. Jaffeir is torn between two worlds—the world of love and the world of political conspiracy. Both react terribly upon him ; and in moments of self-realization he appeals frantically to Belvidera for love

Oh Belvidera, take me to thy arms  
And show me where's my peace, for I h've lost it.

(Act III, ii, 565-66)

Thus Jaffeir feels the sore need of love in his life and languishes throughout the play for want of it. But the world of conspiracy also calls him. As a conspirator against the State he works secretly under Pierre's motivations. He passes restless nights to conspire against Priuli's tyranny. He is resolved to push on mischief and declares to Renault :

I hate this Senate, am a Foe to Venice  
A friend to none, but Men resolv'd like me,  
To push on Mischief.

(Act II, ii, 378-81)

It is highly significant that the more Jaffair is swayed from the thoughts of liberty to the perpetration of 'revenge' the more his alienation from his dear wife becomes distinct. Love, which primarily evoked Jaffair's thoughts of revenge, becomes ultimately the cause of this alienation between them. Though the passion of love does not fade away, revenge becomes a very forceful motive. The derangement in their relation can be traced even from Act II, Scene ii where Jaffair and Pierre speak thus to each other :

Jaffair : If thou wouldst have me fit to hear good counsel,

Speak not of Belvidera.

Pierre Speak not of her ?

Jaffair Oh, no !

Pierre Nor name her ? May be I wish her well.

Jaffair Who well ?

Pierre Thy wife, thy lovely Belvidera,

I hope a man may wish his friend's wife well,

And no harm done !

The derangement clearly sets in Act II, Scene ii, when Jaffair speaks of 'changing' to Belvidera who, in her own way, knows nothing but to love her dear husband :

O Belvidera I we must change the scene

In which past delights of life were tasted.

(Act II, ii, 415-416)

Estrangement in the lives of the husband and the wife is markedly manifest after Jaffair parts with her and puts her into the hands of the conspirators. Pains of alienation lead to Belvidera's heart-breaking sorrow :

I'm sacrificed ! I am sold ! betray'd to shame !

Inevitable ruin has enclos'd me !

(Act III, ii, 151—152)

Pangs of alienation make Belvidera restless. To her husband she lays bare her love-lacerated soul. Jaffair, too, when he is sick of the world of conspiracy, utters his agonized cry. His inner spirit breaks to Belvidera :

Oh Belvidera ! I'm the wretchedest creature

E'r crawl'd on earth ; now if thou hast virtue help me,

Take me into thy Arms, and speak the words of peace

To my divided soul, that wars within me,

And raises every sense to my confusion. (Act IV, ii, 453-57)

Like Shakespeare's Portia (*Julius Caesar*), Belvidera too wants to ease her fears by searching into the sickness of her husband's mind, She wants to convince Jaffair that she is as fit as Cato's daughter and is

able to bear a share in her husband's 'concernments'. Belvidera's love is not as frail and weak as her nature is. Otway's direct reference to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is suggestive. He has possibly taken his cue of alienating the two lovers from the sometime alienation of Brutus from Portia. But in Shakespeare's drama alienation is momentary. In Otway it is more persistent.

Belvidera is conscious of her love, constancy and honour of her husband. But she is not wise enough to understand the motive of her husband's taking part in the conspiracy and most unwisely she advises her husband to disclose the conspiracy to the Venetian Senate. Betraying his Oath Jaffier reveals the plot and the conspiracy breaks down and the conspirators are consequently destroyed.

The derangement in the relation of Jaffier and Belvidera is further aggravated as Jaffier grows more and more violent. The more the action moves, the more his revengeful zeal makes him intent upon violence. A searching analysis of his behaviour shows that what makes him violent to Belvidera is rooted in himself—in his unconscious personality. Though he retains his love for Belvidera he behaves with her strangely. His act of threatening to kill her can justifiably be taken as a revelation of his violent nature. When Jaffier threatens to kill her, he is in a psychological moment. Here his unconscious personality claims all for itself. It would be pertinent here to point out that this primitiveness of the unconscious is chiefly manifested in the behaviour of lovers. Jaffier is indeed overpowered by his desire for bloody deeds. It takes him sway from revenging his Belvidera's tears. A time comes when he thinks only of killing. He readily agrees to Pierre's insinuation of killing a senator; and from that moment he keeps all other thoughts but vengeance out of his bosom. The following observation of Malcolm Kelsall explains why Jaffier's noble passion of love is subdued by his violent personality. "There surge up through Otway's characters forces and passions which they can neither understand nor control. It is this which led Byron to admire Otway, for Otway is Byronic.<sup>1</sup> His characters throw their roots down to the darkest places of the psyche."<sup>2</sup> The following conversation between Jaffier and Belvidera not only throws light on the derangement in their relation but also illustrates how Jaffier revels in thoughts of bloody deeds. In the underlying tension of his attitude to Belvidera, Kelsall has rightly observed a 'morbid violence or even masochism latent in love'. Another scene, in which Jaffier thus threatens to stab Belvidera, illustrates how he works under a furious rage against her. Belvidera too in her fear only appeals to Jaffier not to kill her. Belvidera fears her husband's violent nature and even apprehends danger from him.





# WORDSWORTH'S DISTRUST OF PASSION AND THE LOSS OF HIS POETIC POWERS

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R. C. SHARMA & ASHOKA KANUNGO

The propriety of 'passion' and 'reason' in poetry has been hotly debated : some regard passion as the very life-breath of poetry, while others think of it as the expression of reason—a term synonymous with 'moderation'. Plato, for instance, spoke of poetic genius as a nuance of madness, a divine frenzy, and inspired 'enthusiasm'. He held that poetry strengthens passion at the expense of reason. Horace was one of the eminent poets of reason ; and his poetic inspiration was "modified and transformed....., by a calm, meticulous, intellectual process".<sup>1</sup> Not to speak of his preference for the 'golden middle path' he is often found extending a warning against excess and ridiculous frenzy and high-flown sentiments. Consequently, he is considered the poet of 'idealised common sense and moderation.' Boileau, the supreme poet of reason in France, dominated the minds of the eighteenth century poets and critics not only of France but also of England. His 'Ars Poétique' is inspired by Horace's 'Ars Poetica' which pulsates with emphasis on 'correctness', 'proportion', and 'moderation.'<sup>2</sup>

This craving for reason, moderation, and order, based on the authority of Horace and Boileau, subdued most of the writers to the orthodox pattern of elegance, correctness, and restraint. Doughty points out that "the typical eighteenth century writer in his love of reason, distrusted emotion, and deliberately avoided too close a proximity to strong and emotional effects in verse. Not only did he avoid emotion as something opposed to reason, but he did not regard emotion as strictly within his province .....he wanted, as a rule, no crises where passion was dominant and reason supine<sup>3</sup>." Pope, for example, maintained that since passion and exuberance were not congenial to reason and decorum, they should be scrupulously shunned, and Reason which is synonymous with restraint should be cultivated. It was for this reason that he decried passion and admired sweet reasonableness<sup>4</sup>. Pope represents the spirit of the age in which "men suppress their emotions under the contemptuous name of enthusiasm<sup>5</sup>."

The age of reason, which advocated 'moderation' and 'balance', and made people distrustful of 'enthusiasm', did not come to an end with

the advent of the Romantic movement ; on the other hand, its spirit continued to prevail upon the poets of the succeeding generation. The new Romantic poetry is intimately connected with the age of Reason, both as a reaction to it and also as its continuation. One can hardly skip over the dread and distrust of emotion in Wordsworth. It may be pointed out that Wordsworth was afraid to give tongue to his deeply felt passion freely and frankly. There was something to preclude the deeper feelings from unfettered expression. Crane Brinton justly observes that "even in eighteen hundred..... modern times are distrusted, enthusiasm suspected, and deviation from dried standards condemned."<sup>6</sup>

Wordsworth reacted against the poetry of reason which had resulted in dullness of feeling, prosaic and matter-of-fact expressions. He was the first to lay stress on 'spontaneity' and maintained that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings<sup>7</sup>." But at the same time he was also conscious of the harmful effects of the excess of spontaneity ; it was not the spontaneity of a thoughtless person. He averred that "I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject.<sup>8</sup>" Too much spontaneity was suspect with him and therefore, he also defined poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity.<sup>9</sup>" He was of the view that the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings must be modified in the crucible of contemplation, because poetry is a prior process of deliberate thought rather than an 'unpremeditated art.' Brooke says that Wordsworth "reserved his passion for those channels where it flows legitimately and deeply, not noisily and violently.<sup>10</sup>"

Wordsworth further held that "poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply<sup>11</sup>." It is then in loneliness that affections can be "strengthened and purified.<sup>12</sup>" Therefore, Wordsworth maintains that the moment of inspiration should be preceded by deep and habitual reflection. Wordsworth shared Aristotle's view of poetry that it is the most philosophical of all writings. One of the reasons for his having used 'metre' was that it produced a savoury effect on the excitement of the poet and had great "efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion.<sup>13</sup>" As a matter of fact, distrust of passion and sensuousness led Wordsworth to fear the 'Smoother walks of life' and long for 'a repose that ever is the same.'<sup>14</sup> In brief, he was very emphatic in justifying the vital importance of Reason in poetry and in life.

By nature Wordsworth was not passionless but he had trained himself to smoothen his passions. Herbert Read has depicted the sedate exterior of Wordsworth which concealed burning passion beneath : "Outwardly he was cold, even hard. Inwardly he was all fire. But to his type, he was

not going to give himself away. Not even in his poetry, not even in the most inspired moments of his creative activity.....'passion' of course does blaze from many a poem of Wordsworth's, but not the direct passion of sacred love, but not passion transmuted into impersonal things—rocks and stones and trees.<sup>15</sup> He has asserted that if he had been a writer of love poetry, it would have been natural for him to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been undesirable for readers. In fact it was due to the influence of the Age of Reason that Wordsworth had this distrust of passion.

In the first phase of his poetic career, Wordsworth's love of reason and good sense is discernible. His poetry of this period is illustrative of the neo-classical attitude to reason. A detailed analysis of the poetry of this phase is not necessary as the influence of the poetry of reason has been traced in Wordsworth by many of his critics. There is no response to beauty and little evidence of passion. The pictures he portrays are not at all fired by passion and therefore, remain untouched by sensuousness. There is preponderance of the poetry of reason and restraint in this period.

In the second phase a change in Wordsworth's attitude to passion is noticeable. The passion that he had frowned upon and the sensuousness that he had dreaded and distrusted in the early phase, found expression in the poetry of this most creative phase. Nevertheless, the significant fact is that Wordsworth could not altogether outgrow the neo-classical influence in this respect. Even though the Lucy poems deal with the sentiment of love, they are not permeated with as intense a passion as love poems usually are. Wordsworth has exercised super-self control in expressing his sentiment of love. He has not unlocked his heart like the other Romantic poets. In the 'Education of Nature', there is a happy blend of restraint and emotion, 'law' and 'impulse'. It can be seen that Wordsworth's impulse inclines him towards sensuousness, but his reason controls it and exerts a sobering influence on him. There is a perfect fusion of reason and emotion, because Lucy's impulse has been accompanied by reason. The poet has displayed great self restraint while depicting the youthful vigour and buoyancy of Lucy. It is enough for him to say: 'her virgin bosom swell.' It shows that Wordsworth could create tender love lyrics with a supreme control of passion.

In the 'Tintern Abbey' poem in which imagination is at its white heat, his feelings find impassioned expression, and though there is rich sensuous imagery, the element of reason is not totally absent. The distrust of feeling is noticeable:



passion and reason. 'Laodamia' symbolizes the passion for temporal life, its joys and blisses : and lord Protesilaus stands for self-restraint attained after a sublime self-sacrifice. The poem as a whole exhales classical restraint and celebrates the triumph of reason over passion. Wordsworth avers that raptures, if they are not properly controlled, are fraught with dangerous consequences. Therefore Protesilaus sincerely advises his consort to control rebellious passion, as the gods approve the depth and not the disquiet of the soul :

Be taught, O faithful consort, to control  
Rebellious passion : for the gods approve  
The depth, and not the tumult of the soul.

*The Excursion* is no less illustrative of his emphasis on reason and restraint. In the preface<sup>18</sup> he sets out to talk about 'wise desires', 'simple manners' and 'pure thoughts'. Harping on the theme of uncontrolled passions, he warns against their pernicious consequences. Similarly, a group of poems entitled 'Ecclesiastical Sonnets' and 'Evening Voluntaries' put stress on the efficacy of reason and the chastening influence of restraint and moderation :

The wisest, happiest of our kind are they  
That ever walk content with Nature's way,  
God's goodness-measuring bounty as it may.

The austere mental discipline and rigorous Puritanism to which Wordsworth subjected himself in this phase completely killed the poet in him. In the absence of passions, reason failed to raise his verse to the level of good poetry. That the work of his last phase is dull and uninspired has been admitted by many. What needs to be emphasized is his ever-increasing reliance on reason which ultimately, instead of restraining passion, served to destroy it altogether. The decline of Wordsworth's poetic power must, therefore, be linked with the cramping influence of neo-classical reason on his mind.

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- Ars Poetica*, Canto I.
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Express the Image of better time,  
More wise desires, and simpler manners :—nurse  
My Heart in genuine freedom ;—all pure thoughts  
Be with me : so shall thy unfalling love  
Guide, and support, and cheer me to the end I

## W. B. YEATS AND THE INDIAN MONK

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SUBHAS SARKAR

In his critical study of W. B. Yeats, C. L. Wrenn observes that there was a period in the poet's life when his imagination was captivated by India, an India of pure romance 'which bears some subtle yet obvious relation to old romantic Ireland.' The India of romance truly haunted Yeats. Indeed, if Yeats took any interest in the spiritual realities, it was derived from his love of occultism, of the supernatural phenomena.

Yeats's mystic quest began in his early youth under the influence of a Bengali Brahmin, Mohini Chatterjee, who provided him great artistic stimulus. Later from Tagore he derived a sort of emotional mysticism. But in the last phase of his poetic career he again fell under the influence of an Indian monk Shri Purohit Swami, a Maharashtrian Yogi who induced into him for a while a sort of religious fervour which even tempted him to plan a visit to India, to the latter's Ashram, at the age of seventy-two (which, of course, did not materialize). Shri Purohit's Yogic occultism, however, provided him more of intellectual satisfaction than of spiritual revelation. Since he was always in favour of concrete experience, the supernatural activities of Shri Hamsa (the Swami's Guru as described by Shri Purohit) and the Indian Monk's Yogic practices satisfied his yearning for the occult interpretation of the universe.

A Marathi Brahmin, Shri Purohit Swami was born in Berar in 1882, and probably graduated from Calcutta University. It appears from certain records that Shri Purohit got his initial inspiration in 1913 for going abroad from Rev. Dr. Robert Scott, who was related to Walter Scott, the novelist. He was the acting Principal of Wilson College, Bombay. Dr. Scott was the first professor in that college to specialize in English literature and to teach that subject exclusively. He might have inspired Shri Purohit to proceed to Europe with the English rendering of his several hundred poems written originally in Marathi, Hindi and Urdu. Tagore's winning of the Nobel Prize may have as well provided the ground for his optimism. When Shri Purohit left the shores of India, he was almost a pauper. Even the friends who saw him off were quite incredulous about the success of his mission. In Paris he fell sick, and a French lady who nursed him in his illness was ready to be a Hindu convert and to go along with him to India.

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In London, he grew familiar with Maselfield, the Poet-Laureate. There he started lecturing on the Gita. He met Sturge Moore on April 15, 1931. Yeats came to know of him from Mr. Moore. The meeting between the two took place at Yeats's request on June 6, 1931, in Sturge Moore's house. In February 1932 Sturge Moore sent Shri Purohit's Mss. to Yeats. In a letter to Mr. Moore, Yeats describes how he was fascinated by the latter's exploration of consciousness :

"One of the turning points in his practice of concentration is when he attains the power of stopping the stream of ideas and impressions...that prepares him to receive more direct revelation".

The book, *An Indian Monk*,<sup>1</sup> came out in 1932. Yeats reveals his sense of closeness to Shri Purohit in his 'Introduction'. He must have got acquainted with Shri Purohit's unpublished Mss. of *The Tales of Indian Mysticism* the same year, since in a letter to the Indian monk he asks him about Bahina Bai, the symbolism of Thirteen and of the Moon which resemble some elements of *A Vision*. In May, in 1933, Yeats was busy with his work *A Vision* but he managed to have time to revise Shri Purohit's work on his Master Shri Hamsa. Yeats wrote his essay on the book in September, 1933. The work actually came out in print in 1934. By 1936 Yeats and Shri Purohit grew quite intimate. They even found time to read the Upanishads together.

The winter of 1935-36 was spent by Yeats at Majorca in the company of Shri Purohit, collaborating on a translation of the Upanishads, which, according to Norman Jeffares meant 'correcting the Swami's over-ornate English, much to Mrs. Yeats's disgust, for she grudged the waste of time that could have been given to poetry.' But Yeats had, undoubtedly, developed a great enthusiasm for the Indian monk. In a letter to one of his associates Mrs. Shakespear, he wrote about Shri Purohit's work : "I have just sent back final proofs of *The Holy Mountain* and have just read it all through. It seems to me one of those rare books that are fundamental. For generations writers will refer to it as they will to *An Indian Monk*. The Swami will fulfil the prophecy of his astrologer. 'Preach to the Whole World' though not as did—whose eloquence bores me of course." (1934)

On November 15, 1935, Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley about his proposed stay with the Swami : "The very fact that I am going with a man whose mind I touch on only one point, means peace. I can live in my own mind and write poetry ; can go in a dream and stay there". That unmistakably refers to the spiritual experience of the Swami. Yeats was, beyond doubt, very much interested in the Yogic experiences of the Swami since he felt that he embodied in him the spiritual experience which could offer him the answer to his quest for a subjective system



that lives up to his image of a heroic society—of the unmodified traditionalism.

We learn from Yeats's own confession how much he was influenced by the Swami's esoteric cult :

"When Shri Purohit Swami described his journey up those seven thousand steps at Mount Girnar, that creaking bed, that sound of patterns, in the little old half-forgotten temple and fitted everything into an ancient discipline, a philosophy that satisfied the intellect, I found all I wanted".  
( *Later Essays and Introductions* )

Yeats also derived the notion of the Indian prayer from Shri Purohit :  
"The Indian upon the other hand, approaches God through vision, speaks continually of the beauty and terror of the great mountains, interrupts his prayer to listen to the song of birds, remembers with delight the nightingale that disturbed his meditation by alighting upon his head and singing there, recalls after many years the whiteness of a sheet, the softness of a pillow, the gold embroidery upon a shoe. These things are, indeed, part of the 'splendour of that Divine Being'".

( *Later Essays and Introductions* )

He, undoubtedly, developed a sense of veneration for the religious practices of the Indian monk. The Swami is described by him, somewhere as a minstrel and a story teller. His poems are described as love-songs or as songs of loyal devotion to the friend or master all of which, in fact, symbolize man's relation to God. The translations of Shri Purohit's Marathi poems seem to have impressed Yeats most, of which the following has been quoted by the poet himself :

Sweet are His eyes, sweet His looks,  
The love they look exceeding sweet,  
Sweet are His lips, sweet His Kiss,  
The love displayed exceeding sweet,  
Sweet His words, His promise sweet,  
Presence and absence both are sweet  
The pangs of love exceeding sweet.

What Shri Purohit has helped Yeats to resolve is the conflict between the poet and the philosopher in him. Actually, it was a sort of conflict between Susupti and Turiya—the stages of conscious dreaming and consciousness attached to no object, according to the Hindu concept. It cannot be denied, however, that Yeats was attracted to the more superficial aspect of Shri Purohit's subjective experience as is evident from his letter to Dorothy Wellesley :

"I wish you could hear him ; his tales come slowly, they must be waited for, yet there is enough there to restore the poetry of the world. I delight in his folk-lore more than in his philosophy."

He obtained the knowledge of the Upanishads and Hindu lore intimately through his close contact with Shri Purohit.

In Yeats's subjective system we notice the movement of the soul or the individual and the race or the civilization, in a cyclic pattern and predetermined order of rise and fall into brightness and gloom. For both these Yeats sought and found support in the Upanishads and in Hindu lore. In Yeats's system the bright fortnight stood for subjectivity and the dark fortnight for objectivity—as alternating processes in civilization or for that matter, in individuals. But according to the Hindu mystic idea as propounded by the Upanishads, an individual breaks the bonds of birth and death once he reaches subjectivity, the full moon or the Turiya : he never returns to objectivity or the dark moon, the Susupti or 'Mount Ginnar' as described by Shri Purohit.

Shri Purohit came to exercise a sort of creative influence on the later Yeats as is discernible in the series of *Supernatural Songs* culminating in *Meru* and in *The Herne's Egg*. In fact, Yeats in a letter clearly indicates how much he was indebted to Shri Purohit while writing the play *The Herne's Egg*.

"Shri Purohit Swami is with me, and the play is his philosophy in a fable, or mine confirmed by him." In fact the play dilates on the traditional Hindu view.

Of course, Yeats refused to accept the idea of 'salvation' since he would rather prefer to be a born singer and would accept Original Sin as his theme. But he surely got from Shri Purohit's Upanishadic teaching the idea of the deliverance of the soul which he assigned to the Thirteenth Cycle in his own 'system'.

Since Yeats equated the unmodified traditional Hinduism with ancient 'Christian Irishry', he looked upon Shri Purohit with his avowed faith in the supernatural and the miracles as a prototype of the legendary Irish Cellach "who sang upon his death-bed of bird and beast". Actually, Yeats made use of Shri Purohit and his teachings to fill the gap in his own 'subjective system' in his own mystic quest.

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Besides, I have based this article partly on my interview in Bombay, 1971 with Shrimati Durga Bhagabat who knows the Swami's family very well.

## MAUGHAM AND THE MODEST ART : SOME COMMENTS ON HIS SHORT STORIES

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KRISHNA GHOSH

In his own time W. Somerset Maugham was hailed as the 'dean' of living writers. The extent of his success as a novelist and playwright received ample confirmation from just about every item on the popularity Index—extremely profitable runs on the West End for the plays' record sales and motion picture rights for the novels. One ought, perhaps, to add to this a far more durable and reliable indicator of his appeal and that is the large and devoted body of contemporary readers for whom Maugham was literally, with all the implications of the phrase, a 'favourite author'. To use the novelist's own classification from his Introduction to the Traveller's Library edition his books were 'readers' books', while the novels of Joyce and Virginia Woolf and even Huxley were 'writers' books'.

Now there is something undeniably praiseworthy in the ability to achieve such report, even if in the natural course of things, Maugham has today receded somewhat from the forefront of critical notice and public acclaim. To write him off as 'middlebrow' is possibly to be unnecessarily pontifical and academic. It is surely beside the point to insist that neither Joyce nor Virginia Woolf was striving for that particular effect spoken of by Jerome Weidman, a self-confessed Maugham aficionado: Many a reader raises his head from a Maugham novel or story with a why-this-is-a-cinch gleam in his eye'.<sup>1</sup> Maugham, of course, made his own position quite clear in the final sentence of *The Razor's Edge* : 'And however superciliously the highbrows carp, we the public in our heart of hearts all like a success story ; so perhaps my ending is not so unsatisfactory after all'. Nevertheless, taking into account the vagaries of individual taste and the pitfalls in making any definite pronouncement on so prolific a talent, one cannot help expressing the view that Maugham's best work is to be found, not in the novels and plays, but in the short stories.

It is, indeed, well known that Maugham never apologized for the fact that he regarded himself as a professional writer primarily engaged in earning a living. The success of his plays came as a stroke of good fortune at a time when he was desperately trying to make ends meet. Their frothy gaiety, sharpened with wit and cynicism after the manner of

Noel Coward, caught and held the brittle and feverish mood of escapism in inter-war London. By the same token, they were never intended to plumb the depths of the human soul or to shock through bold innovations of technique.

In the novels, too, Maugham has been accused of lack of depth. Granting that it would be pedantic to expect "philosophy" from every novel, there still seems to be some central inadequacy of conception in even the best that prevents their taking a place in the first rank. The much extolled "naturalism" of *Liza of Lambeth* and *Mrs Craddock* seems to be nothing more than photographic verisimilitude when set against the massively detailed environment of Balzac; *The Razor's Edge* moves away from the absorbing human drama of Larry and Isabel and Elliot to misty metaphysical vapourings that leave the reader 'in the air'; *Cakes and Ale* ends with a superficial O. Henry-esque twist somewhat like winding up on operetta with a toccata on a tin drum; even in *Of Human Bondage* the resolution seems unsatisfactory because Sally is unconvincing in her role as earth-mother.

With the short stories Maugham's purpose, as with the plays, was frankly to entertain. His ideal story was the kind that could be told 'over the dinner table or in a ship's smoking room and hold the attention of your listeners.'<sup>2</sup> The reason for preferring them to the novels and plays is that, though here again Maugham is no innovator, he can be credited among English writers with bringing to a high level of achievement the kind of short story Maupassant popularised in France. One is not thinking only of the well-known but somewhat too theatrical *Rain* and *Giulia Lazzari* but also of the quiet innuendo of *Mr Know-all*, the psychological observation of *The Human Element* and *Gigolo and Gigolette*, and the bubbling humour of *The Three Fat Women of Antibes*. In this field, within the limitation of his chosen pattern, Maugham is among the best.

## II

What is the pattern of the perfect short story? In his essay on Maupassant Henry James declared that he would rather have written one page of *Boule de Suif* than the whole of Flaubert's critical introduction to *Madame Bovary*; yet he went on immediately to explain: 'There are simply as many different kinds as there are persons practising the art.'<sup>3</sup> Maupassant himself had expressed similar sentiments in his preface to *Pierre et Jean* while Maugham candidly admitted in his essay on the short story: 'I like best the sort of story that I can write myself'. The fact is that modern short story-writers have seen refreshingly free from the folly of chasing after the mirage of perfect form. Even so, serious

practitioners have always been concerned to distinguish the short story proper from novels 'in petto' like Congreve's *Incognita* and James's *The Turn of the Screw* and from independent episodes in longer works like 'Wandering Willie's Tale' in *Redgauntlet* and 'The man on the Hill' in *Tom Jones*,

Historically speaking, the tale or conte or fable is as old as man himself. As Maugham says, 'It is natural for men to tell tales'. From the *Satyricon* and the *Jataka Tales* and *Gesta Romanorum* and *The Thousand and One Nights*, through the medieval fabliaux and portman-teau productions like the *Decameron*, to the collections of the Brothers Grimm, the story has held its own for centuries beside more elevated writing. Paradoxically, however, as a skilfully devised literary form intended to be read (as opposed to the oral tradition), the short story is relatively a newcomer in the sphere of fiction. H. E. Bates in *The Modern Short Story* says, 'The history of the short story is not vast but very brief'. Elizabeth Bowen writes in her preface to *The Faber Book of Modern Stories*: 'The short story is a young art, the child of this century'. In *A Study of the Short Story*, the American critics Canby and Dashiell follow Maugham in tracing it back somewhat further to the mid-nineteenth century emergence of the popular magazine. Apart from this novelty, the other problem was that the short story as a literary form was just not taken seriously at all. One recalls Henry James's plaintive lament: The little story is but scantily relished in England where readers take their fiction rather by the volume than by the page.<sup>4</sup>

Some sort of literary defence was obviously required and the need was filled by Edgar Allan Poe's 1874 review of Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*. Poe insisted that far from being a casual narrative, the short story must be as carefully wrought as a sonnet and must adhere to the strictest Aristotelian canons of unity: 'In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the pre-established design', (or, as Chekhov put it much later: 'if you say that a gun hung on a wall...it must without fail be discharged') Poe went on to outline the all-important distinction with the novel: to say that the short story is above all short, is no mere exercise in tautology. 'As the novel cannot be read at one sitting it cannot avail itself of the immense benefit of totality...In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out his full design without interruption. During the hour of perusal, the soul of the reader is at the author's control.'<sup>5</sup>

The first formal theorist of the short story thus establishes its credentials as a unique and autonomous literary experience. Later critics have

followed in his footsteps. Marriott writes: 'It compels us to seize upon essentials. The writer may say what he must but he must not say what he may.'<sup>6</sup> And technique, as Mark Schorer noted in another context, may presuppose a particular attitude. Thus Guérard, writing on Hardy's stories, points out: '...a brief glance fixes an obvious individuality while full exploration goes beyond it to type, to what has already been observed, and often'<sup>7</sup>

### III

It is pointless, in a sense, to talk of 'influences' in literature, since a writer ultimately 'lives' by the uniqueness of his vision. Maugham, on his own admission, was influenced by Maupassant. He tells us how, before he was eighteen, he had read the best of the Master's stories, sitting in the gallery of the Odeon in Paris: 'It is natural enough that when at that age I began writing stories myself, I should unconsciously have chosen these little masterpieces as a model. I might very well have hit upon a worse.'

Now, Maupassant's name has come to be associated with one particular type of story, and its characteristics may briefly be examined. The literary origins of his tales have been traced back to the earthy 'contes lestes' of medieval France, for they are intensely and vibrantly concerned with the ebb and flow of life in the streets of Paris and the fields of Normandy. As regards structure and attitude, one cannot do better than quote Maugham's analysis of *La Parure* (The Necklace); 'It relates a curious but not improbable incident. The scene is set before you with brevity...the persons concerned...are shown you with just the amount of detail that is needed...[Maupassant] does not aim at a transcription of life, but at a dramatisation'.<sup>8</sup> One might only add James's perceptive comment: 'The philosopher in his composition is perceptibly inferior to the story teller.'<sup>9</sup>

Thus this form of short story is constructed in the manner of a drama. Not only is it an episode of tense or exciting action or expectation narrated more or less objectively; it also follows the classic five-act pattern of exposition, complication, climax and a denouement either stated or implied. One thinks not only of *Une Vie* or *La Maison de Madame Tellier* but also of Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*, Gogol's *The Cloak*, Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* or *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, Stevenson's *Sir de Maletroit's Door*.

Diametrically opposite in mood and technique are the stories of Chekhov and James and Katherine Mansfield. Chekhov eschewed action and complication, stating: 'One must write about simple things, how Peter Semionovich married Maria Ivanovna. That is all.' James

clarified the point: 'For some people motives, reasons, relations, explanations are a part of the very surface of the drama, with the foot-lights full upon them'.<sup>10</sup> One thinks of Chekhov's sensitive and romantic exploration of moods in *The Lady with the Dog*, and of the delicate Watteauesque Impressionism of Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss* or *The Garden Party*. Instead of expository and action-oriented dramatic structure, these stories shape like a prism, colouring the surrounding area with the iridescent rays of the mind.

As is to be expected, Maugham's stories tell a gripping tale rather than recreate a mood. He draws from his extensive travels, setting them all over the world, sketching concrete and particularized word-pictures especially of the steamy swamps and jungles of Malaya. Subtlety and mystery are not his *forte*; one cannot apply to Maugham John Crowe Ransom's distinction between 'structure' and 'texture' that works so well with stories like Hawthorne's *The Maypole of Merry Mount*.

In the preface to the third volume of his collected stories, however, Maugham insists on his interest in characterization: 'I write stories about people who have some singularity of character which suggests to me that they may be capable of behaving in such a way as to give me an idea that I can make use of'. This is an added facet to the action-packed tale, and is, indeed, the mainspring behind some of the most interesting stories—"The Pool" and "Flotsam and Jetsam" and "The Colonel's Lady".

But the especial feature which sets Maugham apart is his creation of a first-person narrator who witnesses all the actions and who may be regarded as a 'persona' of himself—an urbane, intelligent, widely-travelled man of the world whose personality suffuses the stories, as does Thackeray's in *Vanity Fair*, and gives them their richly anecdotic and conversational quality. The author explains this practice in the preface to the second volume of the collected stories:

'Its object is, of course, to achieve credibility...the great advantage of verisimilitude... [The reader] must remember that the author is not drawing a faithful portrait of himself but creating a character for the particular purposes of his story'. Though the "I" does not occur in a popular piece like *Rain*, the appeal of a number of the others stems to a great extent from the charm of contact with this worldly-wise and drily witty 'persona' who sometimes recalls Lamb, as in the opening sentences of *The Book Bag*: 'Some people read for instruction, which is praiseworthy, and some for pleasure which is innocent, but not a few read from habit and I suppose that this is neither innocent nor praiseworthy. Of that lamentable company am I...'

Moreover, this practice, with its extensive use of aside and comment, has the added advantage of somehow suggesting the relaxed expansiveness of the old "omniscient" novel within the rigid economy of the short story. To Maugham then goes the credit of beginning the short story "off the point", so to speak (quite against the approved canons of the art), and not only getting away with the feat, but enriching and enlarging the potentialities of the mode in the process.

#### IV

The modern short story is at an interesting stage of its development. It is growing shorter, and even more inward-looking as it seeks to encompass the world in a grain of sand. The tendency undoubtedly seems to be toward the Chekhovian pattern. Like its age, the short story of today places a premium on fastidious psychological exploration, and compared to Alan Sillitoe or Bernard Malamud or Irwin Shaw, Maugham may come across as somewhat obvious and hearty. Nevertheless, from the point of view of literary evaluation, one cannot but agree with T.O. Beachcroft when he writes in *The Modest Art*: 'He is probably the leading influence on the last thirty years to stand against the Russian models'.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Maugham, *ibid*, pp. 85-86.
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11. T. O. Beachcroft, *The Modest Art : A Study of the Short Story in English* (O.U.P., 1968), p. 196.



# CORRESPONDENCE WITH HERBERT READ

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SAURENDRANATH BASU

In the course of an inquiry into Sir Herbert Read's thoughts on poetry and literary criticism, I had a lengthy correspondence with the critic in connexion with various aesthetic and other problems. Some of Sir Herbert's letters may, I believe, be of interest to students of English literature. That is why I do not hold back from the public what was primarily meant for me and has remained so long in my possession. For a thorough appraisal of the issues discussed in the letters. I give below the questions I asked.

March 23, 1966

I. I inquired whether Francis Berry had made use of Read's 'War Diary' (*The Contrary Experience*, pp. 59-146), or of the last section, 'A Dearth of Wild Flowers'. of his autobiography when he revised his British Council monograph on Herbert Read (first published in 1953) in 1961.

II. I suggested that Read's 'War Diary', which covers a difficult period in his life during the First World War, 28.1.15 to 14.11.18; is an important document in the study of his personality and beliefs, and also that all his social, political, and aesthetic ideas are found there in an embryonic stage.

III. In his study of Wordsworth, Read has suggested that Wordsworth has 'idealized' his childhood in the 'Prelude' (Wordsworth, p.41), I argued that Read himself has 'Idealized' his native moorland and dales in *The Innocent Eye* (1932) and again in the last section of *The Contrary Experience* (1963), 'A Dearth of Wild Flowers'.

IV. I pointed out that one who is interested in studying the thoughts and beliefs of Herbert Read and in tracing them to their roots, must find the 'War Diary' very useful.

V. Francis Berry calls Read essentially a poet, but I maintain that he is essentially a philosopher. In Read's poetry, I believe, thought is not *felt*, and thus what it lacks is sensuous integrity. For Read poetry is a means of expressing his *ideas*. I sought Read's comment on my observation.

VI. For Read the aesthetic view of life is a self-contained reality, and the ethical principles lie implicit in the aesthetic principles—namely, beauty, harmony, rhythm, proportion, etc. I argued that this is

an ideal that has not yet been realized, and that the world as it exists cannot be recognized by an exclusively aesthetic culture. Ethical discipline combined with aesthetic approach can achieve the highest Ideal of life, I held.

VII. To date, so far as I know, the best essay on Read's aesthetic philosophy is by S. Fishman (*The Interpretation of Art*, University of California Press, 1963). I asked Read about his opinion on Fishman's essay.

VIII. In his book *The Partial Critics* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1965) Lee T. Lemon argues that Read seems to have mixed 'form' with 'content', a 'Crocean idea, and he fails to appreciate the fact that even in the process of creation the poet may realize what is in himself and discovers the potentialities of words themselves (*The Partial Critics*, pp. 25-30). Robin Skelton in *The Poetic Pattern* (London, 1957) suggests that all forms are organic in the process of creation, and that the distinction between 'organic' and 'abstract' form, as Read has done, is in one respect false (*The Poetic Pattern*, p. 54). I invited Read's comment on this point.

IX. I asked Read if he was familiar with the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo, the Indian philosopher.

Read replied to this letter on the 2nd May, 1966.

In my letter of 11th May, 1966, I examined some inconsistencies and contradictions that one comes across when one examines Read's thoughts on poetry,

I. I remarked that Read does not explain adequately how poetry takes on a verbal character. Since his earliest attempt at a formulation of a systematic poetic theory in 'Definitions Towards a Modern Theory of Poetry' (*Art and Letters*, Vol. I, No. 3, Jan. 1918, pp. 73-78), Read has insisted on the intuition, vision, or inspiration of the poet, but not on *expression*. He holds that though poetry originates in the unconscious, *expression* cannot be 'unconscious'. But in his Introduction to *Surrealism* (1936), he suggests that during poetic composition words or images arise if not easily, at any rate directly, from the 'unconscious', and that these images and words may be elaborated and ordered only at the risk of distortion by the exercise of the 'conscious' intellect and skill. Did not this, I asked, contradict Read's earlier explanation of poetic composition?

II. In the middle of the 'thirties Read seemed to have sought an identity between poetry and dream. He argued that poetry is a linguistic art, and that it has a technical character which dream has not. Both dream and poetry tend to associate images. But in dream images are arranged symbolically, whereas in poetry there is some intellectual or

instinctive scheme (*Collected Essays*, p. 104 & c). But in *The Forms of Things Unknown* (pp. 119-122) he argues that poetic images have an unmotivated existence, as objects of contemplation, as a form of vision. Only in freedom, freedom from any necessity, can the poet choose his Image. My point was, how does the poet make use of dream activity during poetic composition?

III. Read has made use of the Freudian idea of 'reality-intake' in artistic creation in *Art and Society* (pp. 86-89), *Collected Essays* (p. 140). But he has given a new interpretation of the idea in *The Forms of Things Unknown* (p. 97). Read's study of Cassirer's Symbolist philosophy, I suggested, might have brought about modifications of many of his former ideas.

IV. In the early twenties Read was under the influence of St. Thomas's Scholasticism and held that poetic or sensuous apprehension of reality is an issue of 'intelligence'. Read's 'intelligence' was however basically intuitionist in nature, and in all his writings from the thirties onwards he has spoken of sensuous vision or sensuous integrity of poetry. I requested him to explain what he meant by 'sensuous integrity' of poetry.

V. Read believes that all art originates in the unconscious, in the individual psyche, and takes shape in concrete symbols or images, giving the feelings and emotions of the artist a reality. Moreover, he holds, that any social, moral, political or any other ideal, imposed from outside, spoils the nature of art. I maintained that ideas, prejudices and beliefs become unconsciously a part of our personality or psyche, and that by virtue of their implicitness in human personality they enter into the creation of art. In his essay *Wordsworth* (p. 171) Read himself comments, '..... the trend of an individual's emotional life is to a great degree determined by his beliefs'. What does this mean? Does this not contradict Read's basic aesthetic belief?

Read replied to my queries on the 8th July, 1966.

In my letter of 19-7-1966 I traced the growth of Read's aesthetic and critical philosophy in different phases. From the 'War Diary' I tried to understand the essential Read, the man and his ideas, his native romanticism and characteristic critical approach before the 'twenties. In the 'twenties Read came directly under the impact of T. S. Eliot's idea of classicism and tradition and was led to a ground alien to his grain. What I believe is that Read might have been led away, but he did not surrender any of his basic beliefs and convictions. As for example, he firmly held, against Eliot, that poetry is the expression of personality, that literature is mainly an expression of emotional states, and that the process of artistic creation is wholly inspirational. Moreover—this is

very important—he was from the beginning in search of dogmas as starting points in his critical pursuits, a thing which Eliot emphatically rejected as part of the critic's business. Eliot was for comparison and analysis of the work and not for assertion of opinion. For Read dogmas are articles of faith, and as such the positing of dogmas seemed to him to be the first business of criticism. Eliot's influence upon Read must have been considerable in the 'twenties, and it was from the 'thirties that he recovered his poise and balance. But it requires a careful and sympathetic study of Read's works to notice that he was temperamentally and otherwise a genuine romanticist even when he was under the spell of Eliot's classicism. I invited Read's comments on my views.

My last question to Read was, can humanism offer a synoptic view of life? Can an anti-institutional, 'anti-religious' view of life be complete in itself? Do the Romantics speak of only one aspect of life?

Read replied on 17th August, 1966.

In my letter of 17-1-1967, I tried to trace the emotional and intellectual influences that shaped Read's mind and thoughts.

I. Read has an innate love for 'ideas'. How unconsciously did he write about himself when he was quite young, 'I love people with theories' (recorded in the 'War Diary' of 27.11.18, *The Contrary Experience*, p. 118) I But no influence has been a part of his own ideas and beliefs that did not enter into his inner being. An influence *qua* influence has always been a part of his life and thought.

II. My next point was : how would we define Read's philosophy of life? There is a mystical quality in his philosophy of life and art. Read used to call himself, for some time, a materialist in the sense in which Santayana defined materialism, and he believed in 'imponderables'. The thoughts of the poets and philosophers which shaped his philosophy of life and art, are also basically mystical in nature. As for example, the philosophies of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Vico, Jung, Bergson, Whitehead, Blake, and Croce.

Read replied on the 10th February, 1967.

In my letter of the 3rd March, 1967, I dwelt on the literary criticism of Herbert Read. Read has often been ignored as a *literary* critic and adjudged almost always as a *psychological* critic. This is a misleading interpretation and Read himself is responsible for this. He has used the findings of Psychology in his critical studies, and has declared that he desires to give to criticism a pretence of science'. He has declared his desire with zest in the 'twenties and 'thirties. I believe that this declaration has led to a prejudiced assessment of the value of his critical pursuits. Psychology itself does not and cannot attribute to his studies

any critical value. The very critical approach has its roots in his particular attitude to life and art, and the value of his individual studies is primarily characterised by his acute sensitiveness to and keen perception of literature.

Moreover, what gives to Read's critical studies a unity of spirit and pattern is, I believe, his attitude to life and art. He puts the whole emphasis on the freedom of sensibility and spirit, and on the spontaneity of moral perception, as indispensable conditions for a genuine art of living and a genuine creation of art. All his individual studies are instinct with his beliefs and dogmas, and these are the 'principles' that give a unity of pattern to his literary criticism.

Read replied to this letter on 19. 3. 67.

In my letter of 17.6.67 I asked Sir Herbert whether he held on to his belief of the 'twenties and 'thirties that criticism could be given a scientific direction or made a science. Moreover, I asked him, whether he was as confident of the dogmas of the science of Psychology as explanation of certain aspects of poetic creation as he was in the 'twenties and 'thirties.

Read replied to my questions on 28.6.67.

Saurendra Nath Basu

1

STONEGRAVE HOUSE, STONEGRAVE, YORK, ENGLAND

2nd May, 1966.

Dear Mr. Saurendra Nath Basu,

Thank you very much for your long and interesting letter of March 23. My replies to your questions must necessarily be very brief, so please excuse any appearance of impatience or abruptness. I am delighted to help you as far as my busy life permits.

- (1) THE CONTRARY EXPERIENCE (1963) was not available to Mr. Francis Berry when he revised his pamphlet in 1962—nor did he have access to an early proof or the Ms.
- (2) I agree that the War Diary is an important document for any understanding of my mental and spiritual development and that most of my subsequent philosophy of life is to be found in embryo there. But it is a fragmentary document and does not record all that I read or thought at this period. Max Stirner is just one example of such omissions. In so far as the Diary reflects my war experience, its importance cannot be exaggerated; that experience "tempered" the purely intellectual developments that were taking place at the same time.

- (3) No doubt there is a certain degree of "idealization" in my references to the moors and dales of my native county, but I am a firm believer in the importance of "roots" (see *THE GRASS-ROOTS OF ART*) and if I had been born in another type of landscape I should no doubt have idealized that too. Idealization is merely a mode of emphasis.
- (4) You are not wrong in tracing "the seed of my mature philosophy" to the war diary, but this was not a deliberate work ; it is only by chance that it has survived. It is an immature confession—and a confession of immaturity.
- (5) "Essentially a poet" ? I would agree with Berry, but what does the word "essentially" mean in this context ? One might say "primarily" a poet, because it is partly a question of first intentions or ambitions. Coleridge was primarily a poet, but he became a philosopher. I have tried to maintain a balance, but with what success others must judge.
- (6) In my view (and Plato's ! ) the ethical and the aesthetic are identical. Beauty is truth, truth beauty. I have argued this at great length in my educational writings. Incidentally I must send you a copy of *THE REDEMPTION OF THE ROBOT*, a collection of these which has just appeared in the United States.
- (7) Fishman's book is good and gives an accurate account of my aesthetic philosophy.
- (8) Lemont and Skelton I have not read and do not propose to read. These academic discussions of form and content are usually based on verbal ambiguities. For example, when Skelton says 'that all forms are organic in the process of creation' he really means that the act of *composition* is an organic process. Even that is a questionable statement—see *EDUCATION THROUGH ART*, Ch.V. s.13, where I distinguish eight fundamental types or categories of composition.
- (9) I am familiar with some of Aurobindo's works : In addition to *SAVITRI* I possess *THE LIFE DIVINE* and *THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA*. I have a profound admiration for this great philosopher, but he came too late into my life to influence me.

I hope I have not ignored any of the questions you raised, and that you will find these answers satisfactory.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,  
Herbert Read

## 2

STONEGRAVE HOUSE, STONEGRAVE, YORK, ENGLAND.

8th July. 1966.

Dear Saurendra Nath Basu,

I am very grateful to you for your letter of 11.5.66. which shows that you have been reading my works with unusual attention and intelligence. That you have come across contradictions does not surprise me. Apart from the necessary development of thought and (one hopes) increase in wisdom during a long career, contradictions arise out of the different circumstances in which a particular opinion is expressed. Strict consistency is an impossible ideal, and only a dull pedantic mind would aspire to it.

Nevertheless, there are confusions which I must try to clarify.

I. There is a distinction to be made between the *process* and the *product* of artistic expression. The process involves the unconscious at all levels (I am assuming the psycho-analytical division of the psyche into levels such as the id, the ego and the super-ego) and the most forceful images come from the deepest levels. But in the process of composition they are transformed (more or less according to the needs of repression) and the final product, the work of art, should have an objective clarity in order to function (in other minds) as an effective symbol. "Expression" cannot be "unconscious" because anything that remains unconscious, or is unconscious, by nature, is *ipso facto* unexpressed. As the word or image (words are images) "surfaces", it "crystallizes", takes on definite form, acquires symbolic value. It joins other words and images, and at this point the objective intelligence of the poet (or artist of any kind) *may* intervene. The degree of intellectual intervention determines the style (open or closed, romantic or classical, etc) of the final product.

II. This answers your question about poetry and dream: the dream is merely one manifestation of the unconscious, and may not be made use of by the poet. Poetic inspiration is related to but not identical with dream activity, as discussed in *Collected Essays*. p. 104 &c.

III. The ideas I derived from Freud and Jung were certainly modified and developed by my reading of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1953 onwards).

IV. I have always maintained that there is no contradiction between intellectual and sensuous vision—or rather, that a true intelligence is based on a sensuous apprehension of reality. This, of course, is a respectable philosophical position, but philosophers tend to lose touch with the sense object; poets hold on to it, and that is the essential difference. That is what I mean by the sensuous integrity of poetry.

V. The question of "beliefs and poetry" is one of the most contentious in modern criticism. As you realize, my general attitude is one of distrust of any conscious influence from beliefs and ideological motives of any kind, but naturally the poet does not remain a child or an idiot. It is a question of the primacy of feeling, and as I have argued (and as Eliot argued) there is such a thing as *felt thought*: that is to say, ideas are sensuously apprehended. Wordsworth (though also a great sinner in this respect) is the best illustration of this. His famous *Ode* (Intimation of Immortality) is sensuous throughout, but is at the same time "expressing" his beliefs. I should not have said without qualification that the trend of an individual's emotional life is to a great degree determined by his beliefs. It is, generally speaking, the other way round. But if you will look again at the passage you quote from my *Wordsworth* (p. 171) you will see that I am speaking of the classical poet, and I suggest that although poetic inspiration is "at the mercy of our conscious beliefs", the implication is that true poetry is unconscious in origin.

The essays from *Reason and Romanticism* that were left out of *Collected Essays* will be reprinted in the volume that is now in the press, *Poetry and Experience*. The main one is a long essay on "The Attributes of Criticism" which I have revised for the reprint (I hope the book will appear in September, Vision Press, London).

It is, I am afraid, impossible to obtain a copy of the volume edited by Henry Treece, unless possibly by advertising in the second-hand market.

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of Sri Aurobindo's important volume. I have not had time to do more than glance through its pages, but I can see that it contains much of his essential wisdom on the problems which still distract the world.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,  
Herbert Read.

3

STONEGRAVE HOUSE, STONEGRAVE, YORK, ENGLAND

17th August, 1966

Dear Mr. Saurendra Nath Basu,

I have not had an opportunity before today of replying to your long and interesting letter of 19.7.1966 and even now you must excuse a very brief reply. In general I would say again that your main lines of interpretation are correct and I at no point feel any desire to contradict



you. The difficulties arise from your attempt to reconcile my early theories of criticism expressed in *Reason and Romanticism* with my later theories. This is partly explained by the growth of development of thought which is I think a natural process in anyone with an open mind. You are perfectly right in finding the seeds of this natural development in the War Diary but what happened after the War was my encounter with T. S. Eliot and the powerful impact of his philosophy of tradition on my young and unformed mind. Eliot's classicism was fundamentally alien to me but I had to take account of it and such early essays as *The Attributes of Criticism* (1926) are evidence of the struggle that was taking place at that time in my mind. I eventually recovered my own poise and I would say that from about 1930 onwards I had succeeded in reconciling my own romanticism with whatever of value I wished to retain from Eliot's philosophy.

All this will be evident in the new short volume of essays in literary criticism to be published this autumn (*Poetry and Experience*). This includes the rewriting of *The Attributes of Criticism*, perhaps a mistaken attempt at revision, but if you like to take the trouble to compare the two versions you will see what I have discarded as false to my inner convictions.

In particular you will find that I have dealt with the whole question of dogma in literary criticism and brought my views into line with what I consider the correct philosophical position that is represented by Karl Popper, for example, in which dogmas are admitted as necessary but provisional approximations to truth. Perhaps you are able to refer to Popper's most recent work *Conjectures and Refutations*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, where on page 49 you will find a very clear exposition of the function of dogma in thought.

Psychoanalytical theory came at the right moment to support my critical standpoint. Eliot himself was strongly attracted to psychoanalysis but deliberately avoided its application to criticism. I think he was afraid that it might be too disturbing to his equanimity.

I think this is a general answer to most of your questions, but please do not hesitate to come back if I have left anything obscure. I would however suggest that you wait until you receive the copy of *Poetry and Experience* which I shall send to you as soon as it is available. There is only one question which I have not attempted to answer which is the last one in your letter, namely, how far a humanistic view of life is a complete view of life—the answer to the question would depend on a complete definition of humanism which cannot be attempted in a sentence or two. I would suggest however that you have only to consider a humanist such as Goethe to see that an affirmative answer is possible.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,  
Herbert Read.

STONEGRAVE HOUSE, STONEGRAVE, YORK, ENGLAND.

10th February, 1967

Dear Saurendra Nath Basu,

My answer to your last letter has been delayed by an illness from which I am now recovering.

I. Who can trace the course of influences, in an individual or an age? They are like an invisible mycellum spreading its roots underground, or casting its spores on the wind. I have recently been considering the case of Vico (as a contribution to a symposium on this philosopher which is to be published in America). I came to Vico through Croce, whose book on the philosopher was translated by Collingwood and published in 1914. The same publisher was to have issued T. E. Hulme's translation of Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*—this publisher went out of business as a consequence of outbreak of the war and it was transferred to another publisher. I read Croce on Vico much later (? 1930), but Hulme was familiar with Vico, and Hulme's influence on me was direct from 1913 onwards. Coleridge was also familiar with Vico and either directly, or through Jacobi, had absorbed many of Vico's ideas. When I came to read Vico himself, thirty years ago, I found that I had already absorbed most of his significant ideas *indirectly*. Influences are always "in the air", part of "the spirit of the age", and the only question is whether they fall on fertile or infertile ground, and to what level of consciousness they penetrate.

One must distinguish, as you do, between intellectual and emotional influences, but I do not think that the distinction is important, because "nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in senau". I have always maintained that ideas have an emotional appeal, even the purest (mathematical and logical propositions above all); and I do not mean this in the crude sense of propaganda, appealing to the instincts, &c. An idea may have qualities of precision, appropriateness, comprehensiveness, suggestiveness, etc., which are essentially aesthetic. I believe Wittgenstein would support this view, though perhaps with a different intention.

In any case, on first reading Plato or Aristotle, Descartes or Kant, Nietzsche or Bergson—for me these have been emotional experiences comparable to Keats's on "first reading Homer". What remains undetermined is the "instinct that led me to read these particular authors. Of course, my reading was omnivorous and I rejected more than I accepted—for some reason I could never read Plotinus, Leibniz, Schopenhauer and Hegel (apart from his aesthetics), and some whom I did read, such as Descartes and Locke, really repelled me.

I conclude that one is endowed with a certain innate sensibility for ideas as one is for forms ; that one cannot escape the limitations of one's physical constitution and psychic temperament ; and that one profits most from developing and integrating the "self". This explains why I could never accept a system of dogmas, formulated by other minds and imposed for reasons of "discipline", etc. Discipline must be self-imposed and have reference to one's own conception of grace and unity.

II. I have already answered your second question—the synthesis of all influences whatsoever does lie in the personality—at least, that is my own experience. As for contradictions, these are partly due to the lack of unity in the evolving personality, and partly to what I have not yet mentioned—*personal* influences. One can be so attracted to another personality, so admire that personality ( the dominant example in my own case is Eliot ) that one *temporarily* adopts some of their ideas. One gradually finds out that these ideas are inconsistent with one's fundamental convictions, and so gradually these inconsistent ideas are abandoned. And, of course, one's general experience of life itself tends to modify one's philosophy—that is why one cannot begin by adopting a dogmatic system of thought.

As for whether my philosophy of life is materialistic or mystical, that depends on the meaning we give to the words. I have ( in the past ) adopted Santayana's use of the word materialism : but this is a very special use and really goes back to the same Latin phrase "*nihil est in intellectu*" &c. I believe that we have no truthful ideas that are not grounded in sensuous experiences ; that was Wordsworth's belief too. But this sensuous experience can give us "intimations of immortality"—  
those obstinate questionings

Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings ;  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized,  
High instincts before which our mortal Nature  
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprized.....

But these "obstinate questionings" do not constitute any basis for belief ; on the contrary, they keep one in a state of "alert suspense", the spiritual condition I have described in my poem "The Gold Disc".

I hope you will find these brief answers illuminating and I apologise for their hasty formulation.

with best regards,

Yours sincerely,  
Herbert Read.

Stonegrave  
19.3.67

Dear Saurendra Nath Basu,

Thank you for your letter of March 3. I think you will find that I have anticipated most of your questions in two essays which appear in the book which is to be published in about two weeks' time, especially in the title essay, "Poetry and Experience", and in one called "The Faith of a Critic" (not the same as the essay of that title which appeared in *The Tenth Muse*. I am sending you a copy of this book by surface mail, so perhaps when you have read it you will consider whether there are any further points to clarify. But in general the interpretation you give in your letter is a correct one.

The romantic principle and the principle of organic form are for me identical—the latter is merely a would-be scientific formulation of the former. Freedom of spirit and sensibility is, as you say, a necessary condition for the operation of these two principles—not so much a principle, therefore, as an axiom, necessary for any form of creative activity. The word "creative" perhaps begs the question, but even the opponents of romanticism use it. The originator of the principle of organic form is Goethe, who called himself a classicist.

As for my 'principles' I would like to think of myself as a critic I have just been reading (Philip Hallie) thinks of Montaigne: "Throughout the three books of *Essays*, the lines of this portrait of Montaigne's habits and temperament change; they change with changing circumstances, with new ideas, with new moods; but they do not stray beyond certain limits; there is the shape, visible in the *Essays*, of one particular personality, the same man, despite those suicidal wars, despite the fact that, as he puts it towards the end of the "Apology": 'We, and our judgment, and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling unceasingly'. *Montaigne, and Philosophy as Self-Portraiture*. Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1966.

If *Poetry and Experience* leaves any further doubts, please write to me again.

My health improves slowly, and at the end of the week I go to Portugal for a short holiday.

Yours sincerely,  
Herbert Read.

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STONEGRAVE HOUSE, STONEGRAVE, YORK

28. vi. 67

Dear Mr. Saurendra Nath Basu ,

Thank you very much for your letter. The question whether criticism can be scientific or not depends on what one means by a science. Criticism can never be a science in the same sense as a natural science since it does not deal with elements that can be measured. The most important elements in literature are imponderables.

Nevertheless, criticism can aspire to be scientific in the sense that the critic may confine himself to a method that is clear and logical. I doubt, however, whether criticism can ever be exact in relation to the intuitive elements in poetry, for example.

I would not nowadays feel so confident of 'the dogmas of the science of psychology'. Psychology can be very revealing of a writer's motives, and it may explain the idiosyncrasies of a writer's style. But it cannot yet explain what constitutes genius or why certain effects in poetry are 'magical'. There is a whole range of aesthetic values that escape scientific definition.

Yours sincerely,  
Herbert Read.

## ROBERT FROST'S POETRY : THE FACILE SYMBOL

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H. P. MOHANTY

The handsome Robert Frost is at best an honest poet of earth and nature. In sensibility and character, he invariably demonstrates an empathy with nature not to be found in many modern poets. Nor are his reactions and responses vitiated by any personal attitudinising such as is characteristic of de la Mare. De la Mare is also a poet of nature but his responses have not that close concrete identity of interest with nature that Frost's have. In that sense Frost's poems are more objective, more *free* than de la Mare's. But Frost is not a contemplative poet of nature, and his poetry does not evince any contemplative-creative evolution of sensibility and progression, the sort of sensibility that Wordsworth demonstrates. To say this is to focus attention on a serious limitation of Frost's poetry, its essential immaturity, immaturity not of consciousness or craft—for Frost's consciousness and craft are accurate and often acute—but immaturity in contemplative sensibility. This latter might be put forward as an axiomatic criterion of greatness: Eliot, Auden, Spender: Wordsworth, Keats, Yeats; not to think of Shakespeare. Not so Robert Frost. He is essentially a poet of moods, of things and sensations whose claim on appreciation is his 'concrete grasp of the actual'. That is why a number of his nature-images have a particular and straight insight, freshness, and 'accent of sense',<sup>1</sup> innocence and integrity that are not exactly naive but innocence and integrity that are characteristic of the genuine life of the soul. 'Earth's the right place for love'.<sup>2</sup> Pound's compliment to him in his review of *North Boston* stresses his integrity of knowledge and accuracy of insight: 'I know more of farm life than I did before I had read his poems.'

His stability and well-weathered honesty leap to the fore in his understanding of the farmers' idiom, homespun dialogue, syntax of dialect in his eclogues, free from his penchant for symbols. *The Death of the Hired Man*, for instance, is a fine dramatic narrative enacting the husband-and-wife relationship on the tack of the old hired servant Silas. The intonations of two voices, Warren's and Mary's, the dramatic tension of their voices, are a fine enactment of a New England couples' idiom of life.

But when all has been said, Frost's poetry remains what Brower, taking the cue from Frost himself, defines as 'constellations of intention'.

Or, we may call it, borrowing a phrase from William James by whom Frost was influenced, 'pluralistic pragmatism' in poetry. Frost's poems, particularly his narrative pastorals, are no doubt poems of *freedom* as Wordsworth's narrative poems are not. They (Wordsworth's) are 'poems of experience', to use Robert Langbaum's phrase. But in spite of the debatability of the issue it need be maintained that poems of experience, in the last analysis, are the index of maturity, of suffered poetic commitment (no didacticism or anything of the order of intellectual commitment is meant here). Blake's is a case in illustration. Even Frost's 'accent of sense', when one comes to think of it, has not the intensity that Keats's or Hopkins's or Shakespeare's has.

And the moment Frost passes beyond his poetic *oeuvre* to attempt symbolic communication, he fails. The life of the symbol in Frost's Poetry makes interesting, sometimes even intriguing reading—intriguing in the sense that, not being invigorating or original, not even blending to the context of many poems, it makes the sincerity of his poetic experience suspect, or if 'suspect' would be too damaging a word, it makes the sincerity of his poetic experience dented. The facility of the symbol, its utter unoriginality and sometimes its utter unintegration, betrays a lack of contemplative daring, a lack of imaginative leap that alone is capable of fresh, original, extending and enriching harmonies between substances and ideas. For example, consider that well-known poem *Stopping by woods on a Snowy Evening*. It is a neat fine nature poem or man-and-nature poem up to the last stanza. The spare details, and their felicitous concreteness are there in the penultimate stanza :

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and drowsy flakes.

But suddenly, in the last stanza, his ride becomes a symbol :

But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

Despite what meaning Nehru read into it, the symbol here appears to be, in spite of its lyricism and repetition, facile, *af extra* and hence poetically ineffective. The symbol does not blend with the context. This sort of thing is often happening in Frost's poetry. The symbolic meaning of the wall in *Mending Wall* is a facile superimposition. The physical concreteness of mending is more engrossing. *Birches*, likewise, as symbol of swinging upwards towards heaven and downward to earth with its warning that 'one could do worse than be a swinger of birches' is less effective than as a thing for love and play. The symbolic slant of

night as uncertainty of future in *Acceptance* is poetically tenuous. Frost's mountain Hor with its mysterious brook, 'always cold in summer, warm in winter', before it develops into any symbolic figure, with its overtone of priest Aaron's death on the Old Testament mountain Hor, is pulled back to the scientific fact that its brook is 'warm compared with cold, and cold compared with warm' (*The Mountain*). Wordsworth's mountain visions are powerfully symbolic. The last stanza of *The Road Not Taken* at best makes one road the symbol of conventionality and the other the symbol of unconventionality :

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence :  
The roads diverged in a wood and I—  
I took the one less travelled by  
And that has made all the difference.

The implication of the symbol does not crystallize. The response of animal-love to human love in *Two Look at Two* has the symbolic connotation of earth-and-man communion at the end :

A great wave from it going over them  
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favour  
Had made them certain earth returned their love

Did it? The 'antlered buck' viewed them 'quizzically with jerks of head' to say, 'I doubt, as if you are as living as you look.' The doe prior to this 'sighed and passed unscared along the wall' because 'she could not trouble her mind with them too long'. Such instances can be multiplied.

Not that there are no integrating symbols, symbols that integrate into the texture of the poetic experience. *The Silken Tent* is a beautiful image. The whole tent represents the woman, The cedar pole is her soul, the centre of her being, 'its pinnacle to heavenward'. The ropes, chords are symbols of attachment and affection, albeit slight. The 'cedar pole' is 'strictly held by none, is loosely bound by countless silken ties of love and thought', and, in spite of the 'capriciousness of summer air' (summer may symbolise youth and love, silkiness) is made aware of the 'slightest bondage'. Something of the English metaphysical mode, without of course the metaphysical ratiocination.

So is *All Revelation* a symbolic poem, presenting a solid symbol in the third stanza. *All Revelation* is a key poem. In the sense that while it reveals, Frost's readiness to 'thrust' into the meanings of metaphysical correspondence between mind and reality has, in all integrity, will not go beyond the revelation of the knowledge of sense, knowledge that 'brings out the stars', 'brings out the flowers' thus 'concentrating earth and skies'. Anything beyond this is honestly dismissed as 'strange apparition of the mind'.



But for a few such, Frost's essay in symbolism fails. The experience in a Frost poem succeeds in its fact—'fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows'<sup>8</sup>—than in its symbol. The symbol sits either as an outsider or as a tangential intruder or as a weak party to the experience. There is neither originality of symbolic conception nor originality of apprehension. More often than not there are symbolic slants, not symbolic figures.

A symbol, in order to be effective and memorable, must be a daring imaginative linkage between substance and idea and/or the dominating, invigorating pivot, the radiating centre of the poem's energy. Donne and Blake and Yeats and modern Symbolists specialise in the first mode. Shakespeare and Pope and Wordsworth specialise in the second. The most audacious and forward-looking poetry does both. It is in the light of such considerations that Robert Frost's symbols fail. Not so Whitman's or Yeats's. Symbols in Whitman have a power and potency, an infectious vitality and vigour that are lacking in Frost. Of course vitality-and-vigour of the Whitman type are not to be expected in Frost's poetry. 'Calm eagerness of emotion', as Edward Thomas said, not the intensity of rhetoric, characterises his verse. But Yeats with whom Frost has a good deal of affinity in creating the modern romantic idiom, the salient feature of which is the speaking voice and the spoken rhythm, is immeasurably superior to Frost in creating really enduring symbols, symbols that often spin an ironic double vision on the fabric of fact. And Eliot's river symbol in *Dry Salvages*—'the river is a strong brown god'—in compactness and concentration of meaning is superior to Frost's west-running brook. The *West-running Brook* deserves scrutiny for its symbolic meaning, though 'the homiletic descant of the protagonist robs it a good deal of its symbolic value. The passage in question, a long one, begins with

Speaking of contraries, see how the brook

In that white wave runs counter to itself

and ends with

It is from this in nature we are from

It is most of us.

The first difficulty about this passage is in properly placing its 'that's and 'it's. Earlier it is said 'the black stream/Catching on a sunken rock/Flung backward on itself in one white wave/And the white wave rode the black forever'. 'That' in the long passage, third line, means what? White wave or the white wave running counter to itself? Perhaps the later. For, understood this way, the meaning of the next line becomes comprehensible—'we were born contraries' (Bergson's *élan vital* operates in contraries, so does the Heraclitean flux) before 'we were born of

any creature'. Getting back to 'the beginning of beginnings' In 'impatience of steps', does not make very cogent sense since 'impatience of steps' is not the right walk to 'the beginning of beginnings'. Existence 'stands still and dances' and Frost's penchant for localisms brings in the Pirouet and Pirouette. One is reminded of the far better-done Eliot's 'at the still point the dance is/But neither arrest nor movement' and the subsequent lines. In Frost it 'runs away'. It is of course existence which 'seriously, sadly runs away'. One does not understand why in running away existence would be serious and sad, unless of course man is sad for it. 'To fill the abyss void with emptiness' is the kind of metaphysical construct that does not make sense or makes clumsy sense, the Lucretian expression of the same idea being more cogent and artistic. However, existence becomes soon identified with the brook, 'it flows beside us in this water brook' and then the next four 'it's are existence symbolised in the river :

But it flows over us. It flows between us  
To separate us from a panic moment  
It flows between us, over us and with us  
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love—  
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial  
The universal cataract of death  
That spends to nothingness—And unresisted,  
Save by some strange resistance in itself,  
Not just a swerving, but a throwing back  
As if regret were in it and were sacred.

'Panic moment' may imply isolation of being, that panic moment of realising one's loneliness, or, separation from love. Once identified with existence the river is the symbol of everything, 'time, strength, tone, light, life, love, death', even 'substance lapsing (to the) unsubstantial'—a very facile, flabby symbol. However, Coleridge might speak of 'the glorious uncertainty of the symbol' that can thus omit any meaning, the fact remains that symbol has to have precise meaning and significance in a particular poetic field to augment the artistic value. Otherwise, it just becomes an appendage or an accretion. And by developing a symbol in the way he does here, Frost makes it a whale of a symbol. Anyway, the symbolic value of the brook is also given in the 'universal cataract of death spending to nothingness'. One does not understand why death, in its metaphysical dimension, would be nothing. It is, in that impersonal metaphysic of the universe, as good or as bad as life, perhaps neither. Besides, it is difficult to understand how the brook in spite of its 'black water' and 'white wave' can symbolise both death that 'spends to nothingness' (the metaphor of spending implies

waning) and life that radiates 'strength, tone, light, love', can symbolise 'substance' as well as the 'lapsing unsubstantial'. 'Black water', the context says, is the real content of the brook, 'the white water' is only the result of its kick on the rock. Moving 'black water' would spell anything, mystery, depth, evil, libido, but it would hardly convey the concept of death. 'Some strange resistance in itself' is of course the Bergsonian idea of *elan vital* contriving in eternal flux its self-creating contraries. Regret may be metaphysically 'sacred' but what is *the raison de etre* for regret?

The rest of the passage is easy. 'Sending up' is a characteristic New England idiom that in its iteration does not sound jarring. But between the poetry of Frost's

It is this backward motion toward the source,  
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,  
The tribute of the current to the source.  
It is from this in nature we are from  
It is most of us.

and Eliot's

We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion  
Through the dark cold, and the empty desolation  
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters

Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning<sup>4</sup>  
the choice of Eliot need not be hesitant. Similarly the first section of *Burnt Norton* gives finer poetry of the philosophy of time (past-present-future philosophy) and fact than Frost's much-admired *Directive*. In *West-Running Brook* as well as in *Directive* the success of Frost's poetry rests on fact, not on philosophic excursion or symbolic exposition.

Frost's poems, to follow his own prescription 'hold each other apart in their places as the stars do',<sup>5</sup> but when read, as he wants a poem to be read, 'in the light of all the other poems ever written'<sup>6</sup> in the universe of poetry they send out surprising intimations of limitation. 'Progress is not the aim but circulation',<sup>7</sup> said Frost himself and one suspects there is too much of circulation in Frost's verse.

#### REFERENCES

1. Frost's phrase    2. *Birches*    3. *Mowing*    4. *East Coker*
- 5, 6, 7. Frost's words quoted in Ruben A Brower's *The Poetry of Robert Frost*.

## A PHOENIX TOO FREQUENT : A RECONSIDERATION

---

T. GHATAK

The first of Christopher Fry's secular plays is *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, a one-act comedy based on an obscure story of far-off days. In a note at the beginning of the play, Fry says, 'The story was got from Jeremy Taylor who had it from Petronius'. Jeremy Taylor, it may be put in for record, was a seventeenth-century English divine of considerable influence, not known to have been given to levity. This play, *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, was first produced at the Mercury Theatre, London, in April 1946. That E. Martin Brown, a key figure in the modern revival of verse-drama, chose to direct it may be mentioned as a point of some interest. The story of the play is fairly uncomplicated. Dynamene, a beautiful and young woman, has taken her position in a dark, underground grave with none to keep her company except her maid. Her purpose is a little unusual. Beside herself with grief over the death of Virilius, her husband, who 'made/Balance-sheets sound like Homer and Homer sound/Like balance-sheets',<sup>1</sup> she has resolved to starve herself to death. 'This is my personal grief and my sacrifice/Of self',<sup>2</sup> she solemnly asserts. Unaware of all this, there appears on the scene a young man of engaging disposition, Tegeus-Chromis. He is a corporal of the guard charged with the somewhat grisly task of 'minding the bodies' of six hanged men 'until five o'clock'. He comes with the ostensible intention of eating his supper in the relative quiet of the underground tomb and is surprised by the presence of two women bent on 'becoming dead'. Then follows much conversation between Dynamene and Tegeus. It is life and death they talk about. Dynamene seeks to place before the young corporal the rationale of her seemingly strange decision—her resolve to die for the sake of love—Tegeus listens affably and speaks gently. Not for once does he try to be obtrusive; and, yet, it becomes increasingly clear that his presence has been exuding life and slowly leavening the young widow's mind. The pall begins to lift. A point soon comes when Dynamene decides that living for love is far more interesting than dying for it. But it is not all plain sailing yet. Tegeus presently brings the bad news that one of the six bodies he has been keeping an eye on is missing. He is frightfully upset, for the spectre of 'section six, paragraph/Three in

the Regulations' is upon him. Dynamene, now a picture of life and light, readily shows a way out of the gathering gloom. She suggests that her dead husband's body take the place of the missing corpse. Tegeus is initially bewildered by this highly unorthodox proposal. But Dynamene soon sets his doubts and hesitations at rest with her admirably-worded logic. The play comes to a close with everything seeming perfect on all counts.

There is no need to quarrel with Collins' description of *A Phoenix Too Frequent* as 'slight'.<sup>3</sup> Slight it admittedly is. Not much scholarship is needed to point out the obvious—the deficiency of the play in the realms of plot and characterization. After granting all this, it may yet be useful to consider the play in some detail. The play opens on a note of darkness. (That this darkness does not appear dark enough to the reader or the spectator is a point that can be shelved for the present). The scene is laid in 'an underground tomb, in darkness except for the low light of an oil-lamp'.<sup>4</sup> The atmosphere is unmistakably funereal—and ghastly too, with the starlight showing a row of corpses hanging from trees. Doto, the maid, is shown attending on her mistress whose very urgent and immediate purpose in life is to die. Since life cannot be had for ever, it must be lived under the fixed shadow of death: and since life must ultimately give way to death, embracing death voluntarily—thereby having done with the whole uncertain business of living—appears to Dynamene as a sensible enough way of meeting the problem of existence. When Doto refers to life and death as 'cat and dog in this double-bed of a world',<sup>5</sup> she only underscores the seemingly irreconcilable nature of the two concepts of living and dying. Tegeus asks Doto, surprised, 'Do you know/What the time is?' The woman answers with utter unconcern: 'I'm not interested./We've done with all that'.<sup>6</sup> Time has lost all meaning for Dynamene, for time is linked with life and living. Her concern now is of an altogether different category, for she is preparing to take 'the way out of this squalid suburbs of life'.<sup>7</sup> Whether Dynamene succeeds in making all this ring true is another matter. But she does appear to mean business when she asks Tegeus to get out of her way:

You were wrong to come here. In a place of mourning  
Life itself is a trespasser; nothing can have  
The right of entrance except those natural symbols  
Of mortality, the jabbing, funeral, sleek—  
With-omen raven,<sup>8</sup> the death-watch beetle which mocks  
Time.....

If we take Dynamene at her word, these lines are a reliable enough indication of the state of her feelings. And yet it soon begins to

• become clear that the young widow is not able (it's not time yet to say 'not willing') to match the action to the word. When Doto suggests that she take 'a *little* wine', she does somehow agree to 'breathe a little of it' on a refreshingly hilarious ground :

I might be wise to strengthen myself  
In order to fast again ; It would make me abler  
For grief.

This is probably the first sign that Dynamene's highly stylized structure of grief has started to develop cracks, though not much surface tension can be seen yet. 'And how it confuses/The nature of the mind', Dynamene cannot help muttering to herself. But she has not given up yet. She still struggles with herself to preserve the intensity of her resolve ; she must yet see to it that the 'instincts' do not 'set sail for life' again. Tegeus is again asked to let her alone. 'You don't belong here,/You see ; you don't belong here at all'.<sup>10</sup> Despite all this, the corporal continues to stay where he is and his wine—and the wine of his presence—continue to bring Dynamene nearer to life than to death

A mystery's in the world  
Where a little liquid, with flavour, quality, and time  
Can be as no other, can hint and flute our senses  
As though a music played in harvest hollows  
And a movement was in the swathes of our memory.  
Why should scent, why should flavour come  
With such wings upon us ?<sup>11</sup>

Life seems to be taking over, slowly but surely. When Dynamene says to Tegeus, 'It was kind of you to come' (it is clear that the young corporal has started to 'belong here'), the latter gently reminds this impulsive, attractive woman that life can be best lived by taking things in one's stride and not worrying oneself with metaphysical questions of doubtful utility :

It was more than coming. I followed my future here,  
As we all do if we're sufficiently inattentive

And *don't vex ourselves with questions ;*.....<sup>12</sup> (Italics mine)

A few pages later comes the expected declaration : 'I love you, Dynamene.'<sup>13</sup> Love it has always been ; but its role and function have changed. The play opened with Dynamene bent upon dying for love's sake. Without stroking her the wrong way, without in any way making light of her feelings for her dead husband, Tegeus brings her gently out of the maze of her imperfect understanding of the human destiny—and makes her feel once again that love must serve the cause of life, not of futile, purposeless death. Death heaped upon death is stultification of love, not its fulfilment.

'Infused with life, and life infused with our love ?  
Very well ; repeat me in love, repeat me in life,  
And let me sing in your blood for ever.' <sup>14</sup>

Love has brought Dynamene waltzing back to life and light. For her, it is now a new world, put back in motion by love's magic wand.

Time runs again ; the void is space again ;  
Space has life again ; Dynamene has Chromis,<sup>15</sup>

Proper apprehension of the role of love in life has made Dynamene a truly changed person, When, because of the missing body incident, Tegeus faces the grim prospect of a courtmartial and a possible death sentence, the heroine speaks out thus :

You must never die, never ! It would be  
*An offence against truth,*<sup>16</sup>

(Italics mine)

Dynamene now knows that man has to realize truth in life, by living it with purpose and zest, not by putting an end to it, As she offers her dead husband's body to save the truant corporal and, thereby, her own love, the contradictions with which the play began—those between love and life, and death—appear all but resolved, In these ringing words, Dynamene proclaims her faith in the power of life over death :

How little you can understand, I loved  
His life not his death. And now we can give his death  
The power of life. Not horrible : Wonderful !  
Isn't it so ? That I should be able to feel  
He moves again in the world, accomplishing  
Our welfare ? It's more than my grief could do.<sup>17</sup>

Writing on *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, Derek Stanford comments : 'What Fry satirizes in this play is not a romantic conception of love..., but the false heroics of a sentimental ideal. The self-immolation of widows (however Hindus may regard it) is an unreal gesture for the European'. <sup>18</sup> His parenthetical reference to the Hindus is apt to be challenged by a modern practitioner of that faith. But, then, that is another matter. What is more to the point is that Stanford thinks the self-inflicted death of a widow to be the 'sentimental ideal' that Fry satirizes in this play. While admitting that it is possible to pick holes even in the best of arguments, it may still be pointed out that Stanford's view appears somewhat limited. For a proper understanding of *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, it is necessary to bear in mind that the play was written and staged in 1946, just after the scourge of the Second World War was over. During the war, Fry was with the armed forces for as many as four years, though in a non-combatant unit. When the war ended, it left behind a large crop in terms of human misery and suffering.

Behind the deceptive facade of large-scale victory celebrations lurked the uneasy feeling that it was all over with man and his cherished values. The end of the war was followed by the disconcerting tensions of what came to be known as 'the cold war'. Suffering bred sorrow which in turn appeared to generate a death-wish, strange and yet not wholly unnatural for a people and a society, embattled and embittered, plagued by the harrowing memory of the immediate past, unsure of the immediate future. It was in a time like this that *A Phoenix Too Frequent* was written, by a man who is essentially a poet and unfailingly responsive to the human condition. When Dynamene laments, 'The precision of limbs, the amiable/Laugh. the exact festivity? Gone from the world',<sup>19</sup> she is seeking to portray the prevailing human situation in terms of a personal sorrow.

.....Throats are cut, the masterpiece  
Looms out of labour ; nations and rebellions  
Are spat out to hang on the wind.....  
...        ...        ...        ...        ...        ...  
...        ...        ...        ...        ...        ...  
Where's animation now ? What is there that stays  
To dance ?<sup>20</sup>

Under a situation so ruthlessly withering in its hopelessness, death may appear, paradoxically though, the only way of preserving one's identity and saving one's values. Dynamene's attachment to her dead husband is only symbolic of man's devotion to certain values. After noting all this, it still needs to be emphasized—and that is the burden of the whole song—that it is in life that man has to seek redemption, not in death. Stanford appears to think that the 'sentimental ideal' of 'the self-immolation of widows' is the subject of Fry's concern in this play.<sup>21</sup> A clearer appraisal of the play would show Fry branding forced death as a false, useless ideal. Dynamene's widowhood is only a symbolic representation of the hapless condition of man. That the young widow is herself unsure of the authenticity and soundness of her fatal resolve is made clear again and again. If jollity breaks in somewhat frequently, it only serves to underline the unreal nature of her seemingly grim determination. Stirrings of life she can hear within herself even as she tries hard to have the goal of death fixed in her mind. When wine, brought in by Tegeus, is offered to her, she exclaims, 'what an exquisite bowl' ! This surely is not the laboured whisper of a person panting on the brink of death. Tegeus informs her : 'Now that it's *peacetime* we have pottery classes',<sup>22</sup> (*Italics mine*). Life has begun to sprout up again.

Alienation is a vogue word in literature. (If it is also a vague word, that of course is another matter): Man had seldom felt so alienated



from his outer and inner world in the preceding many years as he did at the conclusion of the deeply tragic period of the Second World War. Brought face to face with the grimacing countenance of reality, Fry's Dynamene chooses to shut the door upon life itself, ready to plunge into the abyss of nothingness, trying to feel secure in the illusion that sorrow in this world will land her in imperishable happiness in the next. To say that Tegeus appears as a symbol of life is to state only half the truth. In creating Tegeus, Fry probably had in mind a character that would represent a whole concept of living, expressing life's unfathomable mystery through laughter, a laughter that is sometimes apparently flippant but, in reality, fundamental to our existence, for it teaches man to pick up the grains of gold from the ashes of his destruction. The Phoenix must rise again and again and yet again. Man must continue to renew himself and move onward, for that is his destiny. 'The essence of wisdom', Russell points out, 'is emancipation from the tyranny of the here and the now.'<sup>23</sup> What more useful tip could a benighted mankind need at the time when Fry wrote *A Phoenix Too Frequent*? The critics have never credited Fry with much profundity. Perhaps they are right, for profundity, being a solid and tangible thing, would not have otherwise escaped their trained, scholarly eyes. Even so, one has a sneaking suspicion that *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, though thin in content and characterization, touches on a problem that is not altogether unprofound. If, in the bargain, one gets some poetry and humour, must one complain?

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## THE ELEMENT OF THEATRE IN OSBORNE'S PLAYS

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SUBIR DATTA GUPTA

When the truth is revealed by the ghost father with the injunction for the duty of revenge we know how Hamlet mentally maps out his plan and decides to assume the role of madness. In revenge plays this came to be a popular device for the playwrights as we have in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. In Pirandello's *Henry IV* we see a profound study of a man who has to accept his role of Impersonation as the only reality for his safety and security. In James Barrie's *The Admirable Chrichton* we get a funny type of impersonation. Bluntschli in Shaw's *Arms and the Man* rather acts as a chocolate cream soldier in an anti-romantic manner.

As we go to study contemporary plays and approach John Osborne, the British playwright of the fifties, we come upon another aspect of the element of acting in the lives of his people, particularly his heroes and heroines. Osborne's characters are no-doubt real; real for their feelings and thoughts, real for their expressions. They are full of life, energy and vigour. They are very much communicative, capable of having strong emotions and releasing them loudly, vehemently or aggressively according to their varied moods and situations. From *Look Back in Anger* to *West of Suez* we can easily bring out the reality of his characters from an analysis of their activities, speeches and conversations, the reflection of some modern characteristics in them. But this appears to us only a partial projection of Osborne's men and women. There is another facet—their penchant for acting, pretence, show-off.

The dramatic experience of Osborne's plays gives us to understand that with all the pronounced elements of reality of the characters they occasionally drop into a tendency of acting, pose, display. They betray themselves as actors, performers. This can be illustrated from their particular pieces of utterances and dialogues, from their patterns of behaviours. Even the other characters in presence of them sometimes can penetrate into such pose and performance and express to know its validity. In Act II of *Epitaph for George Dillon* Ruth hears speeches of George and says—"Oh yes, you are a character! I think your little performance has done me good,"

George replies—"You're a good audience....." A little later, Ruth continues—"You're play-acting all right, You've done it all your life and you'll go on doing it, You can't tell what's real and what isn't any more, can you, George?" And then both of them for a while enter into a sort of acting through fantastic dialogues which are dissolved only with the appearance of Josie.

In every play of Osborne this element of acting or performance is evident. The reality or verisimilitude of Jimmy Porter cannot be, of course, called in question. His anger, frustration, disillusionment and defiance spring from genuine source and sincerely involve the contemporary feelings of the new young generation. But when at times he breaks into a downpour of words under the pull of explosive emotions, he utters something which does not ring in our ears to be the true communication of a youngman under identical situations and emotions in real life. We find in him something stagy, specimens of stylized expressions. It appears that he is overdoing the reality of his feelings and giving a show of his volatile and combustible nature. Despite the depth of his feelings Porter performs a lot of what he does not experience inwardly. It is true that in our everyday life under the strong current of emotions we sometimes speak out what we may not think or what is not relevant to our issue in question. But can we accept that in such moments we tend to communicate in rhetorical terms or in pompous? Porter's speeches and dialogues sometimes transcend the level of chatty informal language and grow to be ornamental and stylized—"Nobody can be bothered. No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth...Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm, Just enthusiasm—that's all, I want to hear a warm thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! Hallelujah! I'm alive! I've an idea, Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings and that we're actually alive..." "The inevitable impression that comes up is that Porter is there yielding to a theatrical performance.

The tendency for performance is deeper in Archie of *The Entertainer*. We recognize him as a real man who belongs to the generation of music-hall entertainers, but as he speaks and behaves we understand him to be more of a performer than any other self. John Russell Brown says that "Osborne's view of men as performers has never been so directly stated as in this play."

Coming to *Luther* we meet the same leaning for self-display, theatrical manifestation. What we have in it is not that Luther of history but rather Osborne's Luther who appears to be based on Erik H. Erikson's *Young Man Luther*. The psycho-analytical approach is not our concern.

What strikes us in the play is Luther's show-off, stagy performance... "Oh, God ! Oh God ! Oh, thou my God, my God, help me against the reason and wisdom of the world. You must—there's only you—to do it. Breathe into me. Breathe into me, like a lion into the mouth of a stillborn cub. This cause is not mine but yours. For myself, I've no business to be dealing with the great lords of this world. I want to be still, in peace, and alone, Breathe into me, Jesus. I rely on no man, only on you, My God, my God do you hear me ?"

In the play *Under Plain Cover* Osborne offers a married couple, Tim and Jenny are involved in a series of odd hobbies which consist of a number of fantasy situations in clothes. Their marital existence seems to feed on such acting freaks and thereby it seeks its peculiar satisfaction. Their fantastic games are going well when the reporter appears to shatter their illusion. But ultimately his scheme fails ; Tim and Jenny stick to their seasoned existence and accept dark seclusion to avoid the revealed truth of their relationship. In *The Blood of the Bambergers* the Austrian photographer Russell is royally grafted to act unerringly as the Prince who is killed in an accident and to enter into marriage with princess Melanie with her knowledge, Melanie says—"You'll be like a badly trained poodle going through its odious little tricks for the rest of your life," Russell replies, "I told you : you've sold me on it."

In *Time Present* the actress-heroine Pamela says—"It's like everyone think actors have got no brains and live in some world walled up from the realities everyone else is immersed in," Constance replies—"Your voice sounds quite different sometimes...". It appears that Pamela views the life and world in theatrical terms,—“You're all of you in Show-Business now, Everybody. Of course, Orme was never in Show-Business. Business, Books, Politics, Journalism, you're all banging the drum, all performers now."

In *Inadmissible Evidence* we meet the hero Maitland who from the very outset invites our attention to his series of performances. He seems to be constantly hovering between illusion and reality and gradually confronts his own hypocrisy and submits to self-exposure. Here is a master picture of a modern man torn in pretence, self-deception and failure. His verbal profusion, defences and confessions are only covers for his emptiness, futility of life, the big zero in his existence.

In *A Patriot for Me* Osborne presents in Alfred Redl a homosexual hero who for a stretch of time manages to disguise his aberration and masculine hollowness. But then the truth is out ; he is blackmailed to perpetrate a treacherous job against his service, his conscience. He

does it only to shield his face. Finally he has to commit suicide as the solitary alternative.

In another recent play, *West of Suez*, the theatricality persists. The members of the family of Wyatt Gillman, an aged writer with other personalities talk and talk, as if to hide their void and disappointment in lives. There an American tourist loudly expresses himself—"Man, I feel real sorry for you lot. No, I don't.....you got it coming. And you have soon. Think of the theatre of the mind, baby, old moulding babies, except you won't" What we want to underline in the speech is the expression "theatre of the mind". Osborne's plays again and again throw words like "Performance", "Performer", "Pretend", "Pretender", "Show-Business". At the same time we do not fail to notice the enormous frequency of "I" in the speeches of his characters.

What may be the reason behind such presentation of people in Osborne's plays? Two quotations from Osborne's conversation with Richard Findlater (collected in that 'Awful Museum', *Twentieth century*, (1961) may be placed in this connection-(i) "I'd love to write something for a circus, something enormous and immense, so that you might get a really big enlargement of life and people," (2) "Of course, when I'm writing I see all the parts being played beautifully by me, to perfection." Mr. J. R. Brown in his book *Theatre Language* observes that Osborne has treated his characterization and action in theatrical terms, His view of characters, he says, is essentially theatrical. But this cannot be the total cause. In *Hamlet* the mask of madness is an *ad hoc* necessity. In Pirandello's *Henry IV* the impersonation turns to be the vital and permanent necessity for the rest of his life. In Barrie's play this is a jolly source of escape into temporary wish-fulfilment, In Shaw's plays theatricality appears, but with a definite iconoclastic stance. But is there anything special in Osborne, which marks him off from his predecessors and keeps him so conspicuous beside his contemporaries like Pinter, Wesker and Arden? If our understanding of Osborne's plays holds good, we are to say that in them the reason lies deeper. It lies in the stratum of the consciousness of his characters, their underlying vacuity, confusion, awareness of their defeats and failures, their staginess, performances, anger and invectives are all seen as due to these elements and here in Osborne appears to have represented an outstanding trait of contemporary life of Man and Woman.

Lastly, in some of the performances at times we feel the urge of escape and relief of modern people from the load and pressure of formidable situations in current existence. Jimmy Porter's game with his wife Alison as bear and squirrel or Tim's fantasy-hobbies with Jenny is our instance in point.

# STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF A POEM

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KASHI NATH ROY

## The Text

'Here in this Spring' (Dylan Thomas)

Here in this Spring, stars float along the void ;  
Here in this Ornamental Winter  
Down pelts the naked weather ;  
This Summer buries a spring bird.  
Symbols are selected from the years'  
Slow rounding of four seasons' coasts,  
In autumn teach three seasons' fires  
And four birds' notes.  
I should tell Summer from the trees, the worms  
Tell, if at all, the Winter's storms  
Or the funeral of the sun ;  
I should learn spring by the cuckooing,  
And the slug should teach me destruction,  
A worm tells Summer better than clock,  
The slug's a living calendar of days ;  
What shall it tell me if a timeless insect  
Says the world wears away ?

## The Title

The word 'Here', an adverb, denotes 'in the place' where the speaker is or where he places himself ; the word is being used with an emphasis. In Old English meaning, it implies 'in this world', 'in this life', 'on Earth' etc. The subsequent phrase that follows the word is synonymous with and analogous to the phrases stated above (in this Spring). The word 'This', a demonstrative adjective, is being emphatically used to indicate a thing actually in reference to time and in phrases denotes or refers to the present state or stage of existence, especially 'This life', 'This world', 'This spring' etc. The word spring (grammatical homophone) denotes a particular season lying between Winter or Summer and also implies the beginning of the year, the first season of the year and figuratively suggests the first and early period of life or youth contrasted with 'fall' (cf. O Wind ! If Winter comes can spring be far behind ?—Shelley). When used as a verb, this word 'Spring' in transference of meaning suggests 'to cause to rise from cover (a bird, especially a game bird,

a partridge). Thus the title of the poem and the first part of the first sentence of the first stanza are identical.

The Text.

The word 'Stars' in its plurality denotes the abode of departed souls and actually in pagan belief the 'stars' that move freely and gently in or through the air as if buoyed up or carried along by it (float) in the heavens (cf. cloud, that flits or slowly floats away not frequented by living creatures) are the souls of illustrious persons after death, and the word 'void' specially denotes the empty expanse of the space (cf. He sung How seas and Earth, and Air and Active flame Feel through the mighty void : Dryden).

In the second line of the first stanza, the word 'Ornamental', an adjective, denotes something decorative opposed to essential and the 'Winter' the fourth and the coldest season of the year coming between Autumn and Spring figuratively refers to old age, and a time of affliction and distress and poetically and rhetorically suggests a protracted period of hardship or misfortune. The word 'Down' (grammatical multiphase) is a preposition and denotes a descending direction. In the phrase 'Down (the) wind, the word 'Down' indicates the direction in which the wind is blowing or along the course of the wind (attributively expressed as Down-wind) which strikes vigorously accompanied by heavy rain (cf. rains began to pelt) in a wretched condition of weather violent, bare and exposed (naked). The word 'naked' an adjective qualifying the noun 'weather' suggests the wretchedness of the condition prevailing in nature. (cf. *poore naked wretches.....that bide the pelting of the pittilesse storme—Shakespeare*).

It is very interesting to note that there is an associative link among the words used in this line, as if one word is an anticipation of the next or next after; or the words are evolving automatically and most naturally out of the prevailing thought of the poet's mind (Our thought is invariably encompassed by verbal coils—I. A. Richard).

Here is the representation of the associative progression of words used.

Down (Prep) — Down (the) wind — (violent wind) — Weather — Pelting of Weather — Pelting of storm (Common Phrase) — Wretched condition of nature — naked (bare and exposed).

In the last line of the stanza, the expression 'This Summer' when poetically interpreted means 'This year', and the 'Spring bird' actually refers to a game bird, youthful and spirited (perhaps a partridge). The word 'buries' refers to the immediate past (preceeding Winter) when 'Pelting of Weather' is responsible for perishing a 'Spring bird'. This happening though apparently trifling has a deeper poetical

meaning and the effect is keenly felt in the next three stanzas of the poem.

In the second stanza of the poem the word 'symbols' in its transference of meaning implies propositions expressing some general truth, maxim or motto. The word 'select', a grammatical homophone, has been used as a verb in the past participle, in its transference of meaning denotes to choose or pick out in preference to another. The word 'years' in its plurality is a very resourceful word which anticipates many other words used in the next few lines of the stanza. The word 'year' meaning the rounds of the seasons (both the words 'round', (rounding) and 'seasons' have been used in the very next line) in its plurality poetically suggests 'The lines' flowing from the sources of the distant past.

The first word of the second line is 'slow' (grammatical homophone) being used as an adjective, qualifies the noun 'rounding' (verbal substantive - gerund).

It is really interesting to note that the expression 'rounding of seasons' has been anticipated in interpreting the word 'years' in the previous line of the stanza. The word 'slow' is a qualitative attribute of the sun (rotation in orbit) or of time. (cf. the day.....slowly rounded to the east, the one black shadow from the well; Tennyson). The word 'slow' here does not mean retardation of motion but suggests a punctual and humdrum recurrence of natural phenomena.

It is extremely fascinating to study the causal nexus of the words used in this context e. g. 'years', 'slow', 'rounding' (the sun and seasons). The word 'four', an adjective, denotes the cardinal number next of three, but it also sometimes means 'all' (cf. four winds of heaven). In the referred context of the poem in four seasons, the year is actually divided into four seasons, (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter), but they are all we have in a particular year. So the word 'four' denotes the cardinal number next of three and it connotes 'all' as well. The word 'coasts' (grammatical homophone) literally denotes regions (cf. the coasts of the firmament, Chaucer) and in transference of meaning suggests exploration of finding or scrutiny and is quite appropriate to the context in reference to the expression 'Symbols are selected etc ....' in the first line of the stanza.

In the third line of the stanza, 'autumn' which has been personified, literally implies the third season of the year falling between Summer and Winter but when poetically interpreted it suggests a harvesting season (cf. the fruits of autumn harvest) and figuratively denotes a season of ripeness and maturity. Autumn is therefore a season of fruits, results and culmination and rightly considered to be a season of the year when the



spirit and passion of the three other seasons find their maturity to yield a definite result contributing to effluence of life.

In Autumn teach three Seasons fires  
And four birds' notes.

The word 'three' here literally suggests the cardinal number next above two (but in plurality it has a touch of abstraction). The word 'fires' figuratively implies ardour of passion, temperament, inspiration, spirit etc. (In plurality fire denotes stars, cf. fires of Heaven.)

In the last line the word 'four' is not the cardinal number next above three but implies 'all'. In Middle English interpretation the word 'note' is used with reference to the song of birds (cf. when birds sit sweetly tuning their notes together) and in the expression four birds' 'notes' the word 'bird' is to a certain extent is perhaps superfluous. But the use of the word 'birds' makes the sense specific and the cardinal number 'four' connoting 'all' actually presents a scene of sweetness full of melodious harmony due to 'birds' 'notes' of all kinds,

'I', a personal pronoun, followed by the word 'should' make the statement emphatic, and 'should' a past tense of the auxiliary 'shall' has a modal function to serve with being associated with the verb of liking and preference, e. g. think, do, tell etc. ('I should tell' means I am inclined to tell).

The word 'Summer' denotes the second season of the year falling between Spring and Autumn, i. e. inspiration and maturity, and figuratively implies a prosperous, pleasant and genial condition of nature. The word 'trees' symbolises the above conditions and is linked up with the word 'Summer' through a causal relationship. Trees become prosperous and pleasant in Summer. (cf. The odorous chaplets of sweet summer buds—Shakespeare).

In literal interpretation the word 'worms' denotes annelids and in plurality implies diseases or disorders constituted by the presence of these parasites, formerly, a popular name of various ailments caused by the working of a worm). Figuratively it means maggots of the human brain and when poetically interpreted, 'Worms' are supposed to be harbingers of troubles and Indicative, predictive and symbolical of storm, (violent disturbance in the mind).

The word 'Winters' is a possessive adjective (winter's day, winter's morning, winter's evening etc.) and figuratively refers to old age or to a time or stage of affliction or distress. The word 'storms' (noun) literally denotes the violent windy disturbance in the atmosphere and figuratively it implies the passionate manifestation of feelings and suggests any unrest of mind with tumultuous assemblage of thoughts (storm within).

The word 'funeral', commonly an adjective, is being used as a noun,

and denotes death or decay (burial). The word 'Sun' poetically and rhetorically denotes a particular day as being determined by the using of the sun or a year determined by the time of suns apparent revolution in the Zodiac. The expression 'funeral of the sun' is a periphrasis and denotes 'death' with reference to the life (years) of any human being.

In the fourth line of the stanza 'I' is a personal pronoun and 'should' a past tense of the auxiliary 'shall' has a modal function being associated with the verb of liking and preference 'learn'.

It is really interesting to examine the causal nexus of the words 'Spring' and 'Cuckooing'. The latter word is a queer derivation of the word 'cuckoo' when used as a verb (Cuckooing).

In fact 'cuckooing' does not only mean the call of a cuckoo, a messenger of the Spring (cf. the merry cuckoo, messenger of Spring—Spenser), but it also covers cuckoo-buds (The butter cup, marsh marigold and cow slip) and cuckoo flowers (various wild Spring flowers as the Lady's Smock, the Ragged Robin etc.)

All these vernal beauties constitute the Radiation of the word 'Cuckooing'.

The net result is the appearance of 'Spring', the first season of the year.

The word 'slug' in the last line of the stanza is a grammatical homophone and denotes 'Snail-worm or snail like creatures, and in transference of meaning implies retardation, inactivity or laziness, the causes of the ruin (destruction) of life. So there is a causal relationship between the words Slug and destruction (cf. their destruction slugeth not).

The word 'clock' in the first line of the last stanza is a grammatical homophone and denotes an instruments for measuring time. But in transference of meaning and figuratively it implies to passage of hours, moments etc. as indicated by the hands of a dial. It is interesting to note that the word 'clock' as a verb implies registration of one's automatic entry or exit (to register one's entry or exit) and the word 'worm' though has been considered better than 'the clock', its function is identical (of course qualitatively better) with that of the clock. The appearance of a particular insect (worm) in a particular period of the year announces the (automatic) arrival of the 'Summer' the prosperous and genial condition of nature. The second line of the stanza should be rearranged thus for the sake of analysis, 'The slug's days (a) living calender'.

The word 'slug's' is a possessive adjective and the word 'day' denotes unit of time but in plurality it implies life. (cf. this days are numbered). The word 'living' is a participle adjective and predicatively and attributively follows the substantive Alive or 'when alive'. The phrase 'living

calender' means the calender of life. The word 'living' in transference of meaning of the phrases of Biblical Origin denotes something constantly flowing and is appropriately said of water or time.

The word 'calender' means an account book and figuratively denotes a record, a guide or a model. The phrase 'living calender' actually means a living record ("The Kalender of my past endeavours"—All's Well) (Ph. within living memory). The word calender has an associative link (relation) with the word 'clock' used in the first line of the stanza. In combination 'clock calender' is a common use.

The lexical deviations of the words used in the last two lines of the stanza should be carefully noted.

'What shall it tell me if a timeless insect  
Says the world wears away?'

The word 'timeless' as an adjective denotes something untimely or that is out of its proper time and it is a poetical interpretation. As an adverb the word 'timeless' is neither subject to time nor is it affected by the lapse of time in its temporal aspect, and means eternity. An 'insect' is a worm whose body is divided into many segments. The associative development of the word 'insect' preceded by the word 'timeless' in this particular context is 'insection' which means fragmentation, (insect — insection). This/The world chiefly denotes this present life or this earthly state of human existence, and the phrase 'wears away' means to suffer waste or decay by lapse of time (cf. away I say, time wears—Shakespeare) (transferred and poetical interpretation) but with reference to the movement in space it implies a slow or gradual movement which can be appropriately linked up with the Earth's revolution in its orbit and its movement round the Sun.

So an insect appearing out of time (Sudden appearance) out of season (timeless insect) with its segmented body reminds the poet of constant fragmentation (insection) of life in its daily accounts (Calender) of profit and loss and teaches that the earthly state of human existence (The World) is suffering waste or decay by lapse of time (wears away). Though the world in space is moving slowly and gradually in its eternal round not at all affected by the temporal aspect of life's divided time.

## TREATMENT OF THEMES IN SOUTHEY'S BALLADS

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S. C. BOSE

In his epic poems such as *Thalaba*, *Madoc*, and *The Curse of Kehama*, Southey had dealt with the grotesque and the horrible. The witchcraft and supernaturalism of *Thalaba*, the serpent-worship and human sacrifice of *Madoc*, and the description of the Hindu heaven and hell with its gods and superhuman beings in *The Curse of Kehama* bear ample testimony to his preference for such themes. In this respect he has an affinity with Coleridge and Keats. Coleridge, Scott and Southey shared certain common features in their ballads. These characteristics are a dependence upon the form of a style of the English folk-ballad and the use of motives that arouse terror, which have their roots in the supernatural and have a tendency towards the grotesque.<sup>1</sup> While writing the ballads Southey had in mind the popular taste. He excels in the treatment of the comic, the terrible, the grotesque and the supernatural.

We shall now examine the themes of his ballads under separate heads.

### *Ballads with Comic Motifs*

*The Well of St Keyne* and *St Michael's Choice* are worthy of attention. In the first ballad a popular folk-lore is exploited. The poet quotes a passage from Fuller regarding the genesis of the poem :

I know not whether it be worth the reporting, that there is in Cornwall, near the parish of St Neots, a Well, arched over with the robes of four kinds of trees, withy, oak, elm and ash, dedicated to St Keyne. The reported virtue of the water is this, that whether husband or wife come first to drink thereof, they get the mastery thereby.<sup>2</sup>

He quotes two other sources of his ballad : Carew's *Survey of Cornwall* and Father Cressy's *Church History of Brittany*. The poet observes that the Welsh seem to have forgotten St Keyne. This ballad was published in *The Morning Post* (December 3, 1798).

Southey presents the old tale in fiftytwo lines. A traveller comes to the well of St Keyne and drinks its water. When a man living nearby tells him the secret of the water, the traveller drinks the water again. The Cornishman reveals his own experience to the stranger :

I hasten'd as soon as the wedding was done,  
And left my wife in the porch ;  
But i' faith she had been wiser than me,  
For she took a bottle to Church.

There is great comic appeal in these lines. Since the story of the ballad dates as far back as the fifth or sixth century, it may be called a primitive comedy. The poet's brilliant handling of the theme and the lucid presentation of the story are to be noted.

The story of *St Michael's Chair* is taken from *Whitaker's Supplement to the First and Second Books of Polwhele's History of Cornwall*. In the prepatory note to the ballad it is mentioned that the chair was constructed between two towers for such pilgrims as wanted to complete their devotion at St Michael's Mount, by sitting in St Michael's Chair. According to folk-lore, any woman who sat on this chair gained the ability to govern her husband. The story associated with the chair is illustrated in the ballad. Penlake and his wife Rebecca, a shrew, went to the shrine of St Michael. Rebecca stole away and occupied the chair; but she was accidentally thrown out of the chair and killed. When Penlake heard the news, he said :

Toll at her burying' quoth he ;  
But don't disturb the ringers now  
In compliment to me.

The inherent irony has a touch of humour in it. These two ballads of the comic vein are among the most popular ballads of Southey. Since the story is the key element in a ballad,<sup>3</sup> it requires great skill to present it in plain language. These two ballads conform to these requirements suitably.

### *Ballads with Grotesque and Supernatural Themes*

*The Old Woman of Berkeley* depicts a reprobate. When she dies, fifty priests say the mass day in and day out. On the first night a hideous roar like a thunder peal is heard at the Church door. On the second night yells and cries are heard. On the third night the candles emitted a frightful stench like that of the burning brimstone lake. At last the Devil arrived :

He laid his hand on the iron chains,  
And like flax they moulder'd asunder,  
And the coffin lid, which was barr'd so firm  
He burst with his voice of thunder.<sup>4</sup>

This conveys a real spirit of horror. Furthermore, the appearance of the Devil is also delineated in like manner :

His breath was red like furnace smoke,  
His eyes like a meteor's glare.

The ballad is a combination of the grotesque and the supernatural. Geoffrey Carnall finds this ballad a little 'disquieting', because in spite of the best efforts of priests and bellmen the woman is carried off by the

Devil.<sup>6</sup> It was translated into Russian and later banned as children got frightened by it. Carnall finds it disquieting because of its incredibility, but the grotesque cannot always be credible.

*God's Judgment on a Wicked Bishop* is a ballad with German setting. Southey quotes as his authority Coryat's *Crudities*. The wicked bishop, who lived in the tenth century, set fire to his barn where a large number of starving people had gathered for help during a bad harvest. He regarded his victims as trivial as rats. Next morning, to his horror he found his portrait eaten up by rats and his granaries devoured by rats. Then innumerable rats entered his palace. The bishop fell on his knees and began to tell his beads. At last he was eaten up by rats. Carnall calls it mere poetic justice.<sup>6</sup> There is some thing more than this as the poet tries to glorify righteousness by condemning evil deeds.<sup>7</sup> The thought of the bishop's being eaten up by rats and the army of rats heightens the effect of the grotesque.

*Donica* has Finnish setting. The ballad is founded on stories "to be found in the notes to *The Hierarchies of the Blessed Angels*, a poem by Thomas Heywood. One evening Donica was walking on the bank of a lake with her lover Eberhard. Suddenly she dropped dead, but a little later she recovered. Some time later she was married to Eberhard. As the marriage rites were being performed, the candles emitted a pale sulphureous light. The moment he touched her hand a howling spirit fled from her body and her corpse fell beside him. In this ballad the supernatural and the grotesque have been blended.

The story of *Rudiger* has been adapted from Thomas Heywood. It has a German background. Rudiger, a distinguished Knight, and his wife and child went to the bank of the Rhine for an evening stroll. They got into a silver boat which was being drawn by a swan. At a desolate place they alighted from the boat. From a cave two huge black arms appeared and dragged Rudiger to its bottom. This was the wages of sin.

*Cornelius Agrippa* is a ballad about witchcraft with which Southey associates the grotesque and the supernatural. A young man is tempted to enter Agrippa's library. He finds an open book of which

The letters were written with blood therein,

And the leaves were made of dead men's skin.

Here is genuine grotesque element. There is a loud knock at the door. Then the door collapses and the Devil enters the room. The young man is dumb-founded. Then the Devil tears the young man's heart and vanishes in a peal of thunder. The ballad has a moral tag. The subtitle is 'a ballad of a young man that would read unlawful books, and how he was punished'.

*The Rose*, a ballad with Jewish setting, deals with virginal chastity and the righteous judgment of God. The story on which this poem is based is to be found in *The Voyage and Traivale of Sir John Maundeville*. Hamuel, a wicked young man, spread base lies about Zillah, a maiden. The people were misled and arranged to burn her at the stake. The flames rose. Among the spectators there was Hamuel. All of a sudden the flames converged into a lightning-flash and struck him while Zillah stood hale and hearty in the midst of flowers.

*The Young Dragon*, based on Spanish legend, states the superiority of Christianity over Paganism. The Old Dragon, who lived in the city of Antioch, found every day that there were new converts to Christianity. He hatched an egg out of which a young dragon grew up. This dragon ate up one Christian virgin every day. Marana, the daughter of a Pagan, worshipped Virgin Mary. When her turn came, her father decided to become a Christian. He stole the Holy Thumb from the Church and lobbed it down the throat of the young dragon. The dragon went up in the sky and exploded. This ballad, composed in 1829, was Southey's last ballad.

#### *Ballads with Evil, Death, Murder and the Work of Nemesis as their Themes*

The sources of *The Inchcape Rock* are to be found in Stoddart's *Remarks on Scotland*. In the sea of Germany the Abbot of Aberbrothok placed a bell over the Inchcape Rock to caution sailors when the rock was submerged by the tide. Sir Ralph, a sea-pirate of Scotland, one day stole the bell. Several days later his ship hit the rock and sank. Sir Ralph heard the Devil ringing his knell below the sea. The ballad indicates the work of Nemesis.

Fatalism is the theme of *Queen Orraca*, a ballad with Spanish setting. The coffins of five martyrs were being brought to Coimbra. It was prophesied that whoever, King Affonso or Queen Orraca, saw the coffins first would die. The King and the Queen were out to welcome the martyrs. On the way the King was distracted by a boar whom he chased. The Queen, now being alone, had the first sight of the coffins and expired.

The story of *Mary, the Maid of the Inn* is taken from Dr. Plot's *History of Staffordshire*. Mary's husband was idle and worthless. One night a customer at the inn asked Mary to bring a branch from the elder that grew near the Abbey. He promised to reward her with a new bonnet. When she went out, she found Richard, her husband, and a ruffian hiding a dead body. She ran back with Richard's hat which was blown off by

the wind. Later Richard was hanged for murder. Mary turned into a living statue of grief.

Ingratitude is the theme of *Roprecht the Robber*, a ballad with German setting. Southey quotes *Three Weeks, Three Days and Three Hours*; observations from London to Hamburg in Germany by Taylor the Water Poet is the source of the poem. Roprecht, a robber, was hanged from a tree. Pieter and Piet, father and son, heard moans from the same tree. They brought the robber alive to their home without knowing his identity. After proper nursing he recovered. One night he stole the best house from their house and fled, but he was caught and hanged. This time there was no escape from death.

In *The Battle of Blenheim* the peace and happiness of domestic life is contrasted with the horror of the world of power. The futility of earthly glory is ironically pointed out in these lines:

'Great praise the Duke of Marlbro' won.  
And our good Prince Eugene'.  
'Why 't was a very wicked thing'  
Said little Wilhelmine.  
'Nay...nay...my little girl', quoth he,  
'It was a famous victory'.<sup>8</sup>

Geoffrey Carnall aptly remarks that it reflects both aspects of Southey's character: his inborn kindliness and sensitivity and his unwilling acceptance of the fact that the world is full of savagery.<sup>9</sup>

*The March to Moscow*, written about Napoleon, has traces of contemporary history. In its theme the ballad is allied to the previous one. In this poem the poet indicates the ambitious of military geniuses like Napoleon. The pomp of Napoleon's army is satirised in these lines:

Four hundred thousand men and more  
Must go with him to Moscow:  
There were marshals by the dozen,  
And Dukes by the score;  
Princes a few, and kings one or two.<sup>10</sup>

There is genuine fun in the lines. The poet further makes Napoleon the butt of ridicule by indicating his military plans:

The Russians, he said, they were undone,  
And the great Fee-Few-Fum  
Would presently come  
With a hop, step, and jump unto London.

In this ballad there is a sly dig at Francis Jeffrey, the critic of the *Edinburgh Review*. The poet calls him the 'Edinburgh Prophet' and his review, the Holy Writ. So we notice that he was not only exploiting primitive stories for his ballads, but also he was alive to contemporary



events. Napoleon's fall is predicted in this ballad. Since a ballad may be used for attacking persons or institutions,<sup>11</sup> Southey is successful in his purpose here.

In *Garci Ferrandez*, a ballad with Spanish and medieval setting, two themes—adultery and love—are treated. Garci's wife, Lady Argentine, eloped with Count Aymerique, a widower. He proposed to Aymerique's daughter, Abba, and killed his adulterous wife and her paramour.

W. P. Ker says that ballad implies a certain degree of simplicity and an absence of high poetical ambition.<sup>12</sup> A successful ballad has two other features : it preserves a tragic situation and has a sound conception of a story. Southey's ballads fulfil these conditions admirably. In another way his ballads are quite up to the mark. The material with which a ballad poet works is the basic experience of the community.<sup>13</sup> Southey draws upon local or national history, legend and supernatural folk-lore to construct his ballads. In *The Battle of Blenheim* he treats history, in *The Well of St. Keyne* he tackles a popular legend and in *The Old Woman of Berkeley* he handles supernatural folk-lore. Like a skilful ballad poet he is highly selective in his technique. This is illustrated in his handling of a complex story with a direct simplicity. For instance, *The Young Dragon*. Perhaps for these reasons Coleridge considers *The March to Moscow* and *The Old Woman of Berkeley* incomparable.<sup>14</sup>

Thus these ballads occupy a significant place in the poetry of the Romantic Revival. As Cazamian rightly observes, these poems by their themes and robust art are related to the whole movement whose outcome was the *Lyrical Ballads*. In other words, Southey indirectly participated in the poetic campaign begun by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Secondly, he cast his influence on later ballad-writers. This can be easily discerned in Lockhart's *Ancient Spanish Ballads* (1823) and Barham's *Ingoldsby Legends* (1840). As a ballad-writer of the comic and the grotesque he also influenced Hood and Praed. Hood's *The Elmtree* and *The Haunted House* and Praed's *The Red Fisherman*, dealing with a macabre theme, may be quoted as examples. His contribution to the comic-grotesque genre of ballads is distinct.

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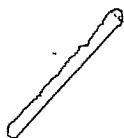
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## “ . . . AND AGAMEMNON DEAD.”

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KALYAN KUMAR DATTA

### I

That Greek drama was religious may, in the final analysis, be found to be very nearly a convenient generalization made on the basis of the circumstances of its birth or the occasion of its presentation, and not on that of the reflection in it of a uniformly consistent religious spirit or attitude of the three master Greek tragedians ; and even apart from the obvious differences in their attitude in this respect and in their reading of ( and comment on ) the human situation vis-a-vis divinity, there is also a noticeable difference from this point of view in the different plays of the same dramatist. The Chorus performs its usual function in all of them by methodically and faithfully trying to relate the human element to the divine, but, in some plays at least, it seems to have an unequal fight with the overmastering appeal that the individual human characters have, can but perform its function in a conventional manner, and concede the real interest of the play to the human characters involved in the Legend which happens to be dramatically presented. The shape of a play ( even when the playwright is an Aeschylus ) was of course considerably determined then, as it is now, by the audience for whom it is meant. As Robert Speaight puts it :

The piety of Aeschylus, the pathos of Sophocles, the alternate certainties and scepticism of Shakespeare, the symbolism of Ibsen and Strindberg, the poetic naturalism of Chekov—all these come to us from the audience as well as from the author. <sup>1</sup>

We cannot moreover ignore the fact that Aeschylus, the most popular poet in Athens then, in composing the trilogy of *Oresteia*, for example, was competing for a prize, and must have known very well that to win he must conform and please. The dramatist had therefore necessarily to carry the Chorus with him even when the human characters of his play came to absorb more and more of his attention and interest perhaps. Such characters occasionally come so much alive, in defiance of the dramatist's design, that their independent reality has to be accepted and even respected, although finally by some *tour de force* the dramatist may succeed (as Aeschylus attempts to in the *Agamemnon*) in subduing the character to fit the design. Thus, the underlying moral, civilizing intention of the *Oresteia*

can be easily perceived ; but if we focuss our attention on a single play, (*The Agamemnon*), we are forcefully struck by the painstakingly minute portraiture of some at least of the individual human characters (viz., *Agamemnon* and *Clytemnestra*), suggesting the dramatist's very real interest in the characters as such and not as pegs only to hang his philosophical and moral ideas from or as showpieces only to illustrate human foibles with Prof. Gilbert Murray comes very near recognizing this in his guarded statement :

...the *Agamemnon* seems to stand at a critical point where the balance of the two elements (i.e. Religion and Entertainment, or, Service and Performance) is near perfection. The drama has come fully to life, but religion has not yet faded to formality. <sup>8</sup>

Religion may not have "faded to formality", but the balance seems already tipped in the *Agamemnon* in favour of the human "performers", which whatever its effect on the Greek audience of Aeschylus' time, might from our point of view be well considered an advance and a gain.

Critics, however, seem unwilling or slow to recognize the truth of this aspect of the Greek tragic drama. They appear to find an adequate explanation for what happens in that drama in the customary application of some tragic concepts like "hybris" and "hamartia" to the characters ; but such concepts do not always adequately explain them, and, in such cases, the terms themselves have to be examined first and their full connotation brought out before they should be used and expected to yield satisfactory results. At the same time we cannot always hit upon a convenient formula to sum up a complex character like *Clytemnestra*. Is it enough, for example, to find in *Agamemnon* a man guilty of "hybris", or victim to "hamartia" in the usual sense of the term, or, does, it explain *Clytemnestra's* conduct fully (in the *Agamemnon*) or at all if we take her to be a "divine instrument", as she would like us to, doing what she did because she must ? Are not there, especially in the latter case, very much more to consider and explain ? And if we cannot wholly explain the words and deeds of such characters, is it due to our failure to understand Aeschylus because he is sometimes obscure, or is it because the dramatist at one stage and for whatever reason lost grip of the character but decided to let it have its way for a while with all the imperfections on its head ? In other words, is not the conduct of *Clytemnestra*, for example, as much bewildering as that of *Hamlet* (or *Iago*), offering excuse after excuse for their action or inaction, which, on nearer view, explain or justify nothing, and leave the characters pretty much where they would be had they held no brief for themselves at all so that at the last as at first, *Clytemnestra* remains—

Clytemnestra as Hamlet to this day remains—Hamlet? Such characters may truly be said to cast a spell on, to fascinate their creators, take on a life of their own not to be denied them, and the dramatist cannot perhaps think of doing better than let them follow their career with a helping hand from him. Inevitably, contradictions arise, a lack of proper integration or organization in the characters which later generations find beyond their powers to explain away. So far as the *Agamemnon* is concerned, some such thing seems to have happened in the characterization of Clytemnestra, and all the moralizing and warning of the Chorus of Argive Elders could not daunt this irrepressible personality with the result that the *Agamemnon* produces the impression of not religion using drama but drama using religion as a means to an end. Hence the use of the Chorus to screw up, as it were, the mind of the audience to the sticking place so that it may not fail religion. The dramatist is taken up more with the delineation of matters human than matters divine, making the study of an individual human character in all its perversity his primary preoccupation, and let the gods be talked about, as they must needs be, in a conventional manner, as often, it would seem, in this play. This can explain Aeschylus giving so many motives of action to Clytemnestra. If religion or morals were the only important point to be made in the play, the one motive of her acting as a divine instrument would have been enough. Instead, Clytemnestra is made to go on enumerating her many motives very much as the all too easily identifiable Shakespearean villain does, and convinces neither others nor apparently themselves. Such careful portraiture of a perverse character is astonishing when we remember the times. Coming to deal with the Legend of the House of Atreus, Aeschylus must have thoroughly acquainted himself with all the available or ascertainable particulars. He must have known the different Clytemnestras given in the different versions of the Legend. In this sense his Clytemnestra is not wholly an original creation of his; but it is important to note that where more than one version of a character is available for fresh treatment, that which is actually taken up is the result of a deliberate choice, a choice that originally might have been dictated by the needs of dramatic design but in the event overstepped such needs and the character allowed to live in her own right till very late in the play, assuming through the dramatist's generosity such proportions as to disturb visibly the balance of the two elements (of Religion and Entertainment) in the play. The dramatist has thus created problems for his readers, too. We can neither wash away flaws like a degree of self-centredness and overconfidence in Agamemnon nor wholly withhold our pity for Clytemnestra when she as a mother laments, however showily, the sacrifice of her daughter, although finally

Agamemnon impresses us by his openness of mind and Clytemnestra alienates our mind by her being obviously hardened in guilt and being impervious to reason and sense. Being a dramatist, Aeschylus could not say all, even if he chose to ; more is left to suggestion, which encourages speculation. To anticipate a little. In welcoming her husband on his return home, Clytemnestra reminisces :

Surely I and thou

Have suffered in time past enough ! (GM)

Clytemnestra dealing in lies all through her speech of welcome cannot have lied here ; Agamemnon would know. But is the suffering she speaks of the suffering as King and Queen or is it their domestic suffering, suffering due to the two minds living out of contact with each other ? Or, again, is it possible that when Agamemnon and Menelaus on the murder of their father, Atreus, by Aegisthus—Aegisthus, let us note, whom Clytemnestra preferred to Agamemnon, did not have his hands unstained with blood nor was his father a less guilty man than his victim Atreus—they were looked upon princes only in name, and from that time through her marriage and her married life with Agamemnon, she continued to look upon Agamemnon with pity and some scorn—of which she will later accuse Agamemnon—and they as it appeared to her, overbearing attitude of Agamemnon towards her had engendered that proud silence of a superior being as she must have considered herself to be which finally took the shape of an implacable hatred resulting in a ghastly deed ? Agamemnon all the while may have been blissfully ignorant of all this, and went his way dangerously unconcerned. Or, what about the Iphigenia episode, itself a later addition to the Legend ? How is it that a young girl accompanies her father who is out on a momentous and certainly perilous expedition ? Could Clytemnestra, the mother, be persuaded to agree to this, or was Iphigenia taken away by Agamemnon in spite of her opposition, and did the estrangement between the husband and the wife begin right there or at least some fuel was added to the fire of Clytemnestra hatred by thus being overruled or ignored ? But from such speculation let us turn to the facts and characters as presented in the play itself.

## II

At least one critic has characterized Agamemnon as an "unattractive character."<sup>8</sup> He must have looked at the character through the eyes of Clytemnestra. Such prejudiced remarks about Agamemnon are the rule rather than the exception, and, it would seem, in their assessment of Agamemnon, critics have been somewhat influenced and misled by the Agamemnon of Homer. But we should be as wrong to read the Agamem-

non of Homer into the Agamemnon of Aeschylus as if we committed the absurd blunder of discovering in the Clytemnestra that Aeschylus gives us the other Clytemnestra found in an earlier version of the Legend where she is "une femme honnête mais sans volonté."<sup>4</sup> Prof. Murray goes to the extent of taking the name to pieces to suggest that some warning against excess was contained in the very name of Agamemnon—"Aga mimnei."<sup>5</sup> The Agamemnon of Aeschylus is, however, perceptively different from the picture of this King that we find in Homer. The Agamemnon of Homer is proud and rapacious ; in the play of Aeschylus, he is clearly presented as a frank, god-fearing, self-possessed, responsible, even an amiable personality, a good master loved by such ordinary people as the Watchman and the Herald, on his death movingly lamented by the Mourners<sup>6</sup> so that Clytemnestra has to come out with all her ingenious excuses in defence of herself. The faults of Agamemnon are those of a self-confident, successful man who perhaps has had very little call for introspection and yet was not "thoughtless". But let us begin from the beginning. The Watchman, the minor but thoroughly alive character that opens the play and almost at once wins us over, when he notices the beacon light announcing the fall of Troy, is delighted at the prospect of clasping again his dear lord's hand :

Oh, good to cherish my King's hand in mine

When he comes home and the household hath a head ! (C)

This watchman is no fool. He is not uncritically servile. He has his eyes and ears open, and knows more perhaps than he should of the Palace secrets, but is not the person to be caught babbling about them. He gives us dark hints about Clytemnestra to whom

Cleaveth a woman's heart, man-passioned ! (GM)

and about his

Sighing for the tale untold

Of this house, not wellmastered as of old. (GM)

He has observed for himself what "these stonewalls know well" but

For me, to him that knoweth I can yet

Speak ; if another questions I forget. (GM)

The Herald—perhaps a more emotional character ( though in his position such emotion as he displays was but natural )—making his appearance some time later, has words of clear admiration for his King and for his achievement—the total destruction of Troy—which are infectious almost, and, we must believe, are as much the dramatist's deliberately chosen expression as that given earlier to the Watchman :

...Agamemnon cometh ! A great light

Cometh to men and gods out of the night. (GM)

Agamemnon comes

Who, God's avenging mattock in his hand,  
Hath wrecked Troy's towers and digged her soil beneath...  
The first Atreides, King of Kings at last,  
And happy among men ! To whom we give  
Honour most high above all things that live. (GM)

This Herald in his innocence does not of course perceive what irony lurked behind his "happy among men" tribute. But both these servants, one quietly observant and poised, the other simple and emotive, strike the common attitude of love and admiration for their King. Prof. Kitto has repeatedly drawn our attention to the devices in the play bestowing stature on Clytemnestra ;<sup>7</sup> but here obviously is stature, or at least attractiveness given to Agamemnon in no uncertain terms.

What light again does the Iphigenia episode throw on Agamemnon's character, the episode of which so much is made by Clytemnestra later in the play so that it has generally been held to be the mainspring of Clytemnestra's act of revenge against her husband ? When Calchas announced the need for the sacrifice, the brother kings were not unaffected by the nature of sacrifice demanded of them :

And the brother Kings they shook in the hearts of them,  
And smote on the earth their staves, and the tears came.  
But the King, the elder, hath found voice and spoken :  
"A heavy doom, sure, if God's will were broken ;  
But to slay mine own child, who my house delighteth,  
Is that not heavy ? That her blood should flow  
On her father's hand, hard beside an altar ?  
My path is sorrow wheresoe'er I go.  
Shall Agamemnon fail his ships and people,  
And the hosts of Hellas melt as melts the snow ?  
They cry, they thirst, for a death that shall break the spell,  
For a Virgin's blood : 'tis a rite of old, men tell.

And they burn with longing. —O God may the end be well ! (GM)

The whole picture is here ; and unless we are already prejudiced against Agamemnon so that seeing we see not and hearing we do not hear, we cannot miss the mood of sorrow, bitterness, and even despair in the father's heart so clearly expressed together with the sense of responsibility showed by the leader of the Greek host which made him bow to the rigorous need of the hour and to what he considered "God's will", especially against the background that such a sacrifice was a "rite of old". But the lines that follow immediately can raise some doubt, as they are obviously meant to do ; we are told that "a strange wind" tossed within Agamemnon's bosom—



A wind of dark thought, unclean, unholy ;  
And he rose up, daring to the uttermost.  
For men are boldened by a Blindness, straying

Toward base desire, which brings grief hereafter (GM)

Is it Ambition that is being hinted at? The picture of the preparation for the sacrifice is truly piteous. Here is something that go ill with the earlier picture of the King the dramatist has given us. Iphigenia's pitiful cry of "Father, Father" and "her eye with an arrow of pity" which

found its path

To each man's heart that slew (GM)

apparently constitute, and is meant to constitute, a blot on Agamemnon as a father—a noticeable inconsistency in Aeschylus who has otherwise clearly given a favourable portrait of him, but an inconsistency which was thrust upon him by a dramatic need. For how otherwise can we find at least a partial justification for the heavy doom that befalls him? We shall have to note a few other such references which spring from a similar conventional dramatic need.<sup>8</sup> We cannot of course ignore the next picture—the "angry pain" that steals over the people of Argos when they see returning instead of the men that went

Armour and dust of burning (GM)

and are obviously grieved over their King being "too forward in the strife". We also note here the use of the expression—"the shedder of much blood", applied to Agamemnon by implication, who "does not remain unmarked of God."<sup>9</sup> This is one of those remarks which put to mind of the religious framework of the play and the inescapable need the dramatist was under of drawing attention to this aspect of it off and on, also for the additional reason, as already suggested once, of providing justification for the fate which is to overcome the tragic protagonist. For, apart from the fair portrayal of this character elsewhere, the dramatist also shows him, in the very first words given to him on return home, very clear in his mind that in whatever he did to Troy to avenge the wrong done to his family he enjoyed the full support, if not the co-operation, of the gods; though here he may have been mistaken in taking the gods as too straightforward and dependable a set of people, and not as Olympians with obscure, if not crooked, ways of their own. Here is how Agamemnon expresses his mind on reaching his Argive soil:

To Argos and the gods of Argolis  
All hail...

(GM)

because

The great gods heard our cause

and "cast their great vote" ; and, for, their success, "let thanks,  
wide as our glories are,

Be uplifted...

Lo, to the Gods I make these thanksgivings. (GM)

As King, he takes note of the hint given him of possible defection at home, and shows coolness and wisdom in his response. He will not proceed in the matter autocratically or tyrannically—

...touching our state

And gods, we shall assemble in debate

A concourse of the Argos, taking sure

Counsel. (GM)

This is not the picture of a hasty or an arrogant but of a responsible and thoughtful leader of man. And the concluding words of this speech unmistakably confirm his trustfulness in the gods—but how misplaced !

Aye, Heaven hath led me back ;

And on this hearth where still my fire doth burn

I will go pay to heaven my due return,

Which guides me here, which saved me far away. (GM).

The impression here created is certainly not vitiated by a conquerer's natural wish frankly uttered :

O Victory now mine own, be mine alway !

—a frankness which is as much characteristic of Agamemnon as deceit of his Queen. Agamemnon's wisdom does not leave him when, immediately following this, his Queen makes her appearance and, after the expression of what in her position appears to be very innocuous and natural complaints of her lonely life and suffering all these years that her was away, offers her deceitful words of welcome to him, and urges the King to walk to his Palace across "tapestries of crimson and gold" spread before him. Agamemnon's response to all this is noticeable. He would have preferred such words of welcome as she utters from "some other, not my Queen" whom he would not like to try to "make me soft in woman's way" or grovel before him. He has self-respect, and would like his queen to be equally full of it. But his most serious objection is to his walking, as she requests, across the costly tapestries, for that might "awake the unseen ire". His victory has not gone to his head ( as Alexander's, we are told, did so that he came to look upon himself as a god). Agamemnon does not forget his God :

... 'Tis God that hath

Such worship ; and for mortal man to press

Rude feet upon this brodered loveliness...

I vow there is danger in it. Let my road

*Be honoured, surely ; but as man, not god, (GM)*

( *Lego kat andra, me theon, sebein eme* )

With true humility and wisdom he concludes :

.. Aye, and not to fall

Suddenly blind is of all gifts the best

God giveth, for I reckon no man blest

Ere to the utmost goal his race be run. (GM)

How after this the charge of "hybris" can be brought against Agamemnon is difficult to understand. Clytemnestra persists, using all manner of arguments to persuade her husband to meet her perverse wish, but only when the dialogue takes on a note of blandishment on the part of his queen, pleading with her husband "by yielding to command", Agamemnon agrees to "indulge" what he must have considered as a momentary whim of Clytemnestra, praying even then that

...while I walk yon wonders of the sea

God grant no eye of wrath be cast on me

From far !<sup>10</sup>

But his mind is not in it. Even while preparing to walk across the "broi-dered loveliness" and before he does it, he instructs Clytemnestra about something which occupies his mind more—she is to treat the captive-princess Cassandra with all gentleness ; for

God's eye doth see, and loveth from afar

The merciful conquerer. For no slave of war

Is slave by his own will. (GM)

Here is the picture of a truly magnanimous mind, considerate and merciful even in the moment of victory and triumph. Then, with a feeling of constraint, he walks to his Palace ; and that is the last we see of him in the play.

What, then, is the "hamartia", the tragic flaw for which he pays so dearly ? The conventional or orthodox concepts of "hybris" and "hamartia" are made to do their usual duty, and are considered explanation enough. But "hybris" means quite a number of things in different contexts, and "hamartia" too might rightly be suggested to have a meaning different from the usually accepted one, as Lattimore, quoting Prof. Else and extending his meaning suitably, actually suggests<sup>11</sup>. "Hybris", then, as Lattimore enumerates, "with its family of nouns, verbs and adjectives, simple or compounded, may signify assault and battery, rape, foul play, or plain physical disaster without motivation ; the activity of wild animal spirits, rapacity and greed, sexual lust ; in general, violence ; violent or criminal behaviour ; thus insolence as in Milton's "sons of Belial flown with insolence and wine ; bullying, the abuse of superior strength to humiliate the

helpless living or outrage the helpless dead ; or the mockery of the sorrowful ; conversely, mutiny or rebelliousness in an inferior toward a superior ; and so, rather rarely, ordinary insolence."<sup>12</sup> "The idea of hybris as pride or arrogance punished by the gods", Lattimore further shows, might have appeared as late as the early nineteenth century, but his last sense is the one "adopted a priori by many writers, both technical and popular, on Greek tragedy and Greek thought in general".<sup>13</sup> What, then, is the hybris of Agamemnon ? From the picture of the character in the play of Aeschylus, it is certainly not "rapacity and greed, sexual lust", whatever his picture elsewhere may suggest or whatever Clytemnestra, with her guilty and jealous mind, in her deceitfulness and in her design to confuse people's mind or justify her misdeed, may discover in her husband's conduct. Equally certainly is the hybris of Agamemnon not "the abuse of superior strength to humiliate the helpless living" if we remember his words of direction to Clytemnestra about the helpless captive girl Cassandra. Most of the other meanings have no application to this particular case. But cutting clean through the maze of meanings, we may arrive at the late meaning foisted on it—that of pride or arrogance punished by the gods. The punishment is there of course, but there is very little evidence of pride or arrogance in Agamemnon's behaviour anywhere in the play. It is, to be sure, not so obvious or evident in the episode readily cited to prove it, viz., the tapestry-episode, as should be sufficiently clear from a careful study of Agamemnon's words there of which an analysis has already been attempted. Agamemnon's fear of rousing the jealousy of the gods as expressed there has been termed "conventional".<sup>14</sup> If that is so, the sentiments expressed by the Chorus throughout the play with regard to the gods may well be termed conventional too without any special relevance to the legend given a dramatic shape by Aeschylus in this play. In fact, if frankness and straightforwardness are the obvious traits of Agamemnon's character as we are persuaded to believe they are by Aeschylus' depiction of it, we must take him (what we cannot do with Clytemnestra) at his word throughout the play. The total destruction of Troy may be adduced as an evidence of his "arrogance", but, as already observed, from what he says in that connexion, it might be only a misunderstanding of the divine intention, and being too thorough in acting up to it, and not a deliberate act of doing something against the wishes of the "The gods of Argolis" who, it may be said, were stung with his vanity betrayed by his use of the words "τῶν εἰμὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς" where he may have ranked himself with the gods themselves. But the word 'metaitios' need not imply that only. So that we find the word bearing different meanings in different renderings : the gods "sharing with me" (Murray) ; "joint authors" (Cookson) ; "who have

aided me" (Macneice) ; partner (s) (Kitto).<sup>15</sup> No definite charge of arrogance can therefore be brought on the basis of an expression which has been so variously interpreted. Nor can any support be found for this charge here from the overall picture of the man the dramatist gives us.

How, again, are we to use the other term or concept—"hamartia"—in Agamemnon's case? In the usual meaning of flaw such as pride, impiety, over-confidence, ambition, anger, we cannot perhaps wholly find the cause of Agamemnon's "downfall", although "over-confidence" may offer some partial explanation. *Hamartia* has been taken by Prof. Else to refer to "something much more narrow and specific", viz., "the misidentification of a person."<sup>15a</sup> Lattimore rightly suggests that the misidentification may not refer to the physical aspect of a person, but it may be a misidentification of or mistaking the character. Here perhaps we are nearest the truth. In discussing Clytemnestra's character in the next section, an attempt will be made to suggest that Agamemnon's *hamartia* may have been a misreading of that character. But the other condition accompanying this meaning of the term, viz., that the mistaken truth must be rescued and recognition is likely to follow could not of course be fulfilled in the case of Agamemnon (just as—"learning by suffering"—also could not be); Agamemnon does not survive his mistake (or suffering) to benefit by it. It was *hamartia* in this Else-Lattimore sense, and not his conscious arrogance or contempt, that may well have been the cause of Agamemnon's tragic fate.

### III

About Clytemnestra it is not enough to say (as some have said) that hers is a complex character; in one sense, she is complex; in another, she is not. She is not complex if we consider her to be a sinful woman hardened in her life of sin and pursuing it unashamedly. On the other hand, if we try the human (or humane) approach, and try to take hers to be an example of the degeneration and deterioration of character under the pressure of circumstances and study the motives for action that she herself suggests to justify her act of husband-murder, the character may strike us as truly bewildering in its complexity, though still fascinating because of the clear suggestion of her great capability, bold initiative and splendid self-confidence. She shares with Macbeth his magnificent imagination, with Iago his unconvincing motive-hunting, with Hamlet his inexplicable nature, but does she also have Lady Macbeth's fundamental womanliness? We shall see. But of one thing we can be sure at once. To start with, Aeschylus must have made a deliberate choice of a Clytemnestra out of more than one rendering of the

character he found in the relevant legend, but at some stage in the drama, the character must have gone out of control, taking a life of her own, and living it in her own right. This may partly have been due to the mixture in the dramatist's mind of the different types of the character we find in the legend, which Aeschylus must have studied carefully before making the choice of his own Clytemnestra. Before Aeschylus, then, there was one Clytemnestra who long resists the advances of Aegisthus, partly because Agamemnon before his departure for Troy had set a watch upon her ("il confie a un aede le soin de veiller sur Clytemnestre")<sup>16</sup> and partly because she is a good woman at heart ("son coeur est honnête"). But Aegisthus who is shown as a determined character in this legend, pursues his design of possessing Clytemnestra relentlessly in spite of divine warning, and, who, banishing Agamemnon's "aede" and setting his own "guetteur"<sup>17</sup> on a high hill against any surprise return of Agamemnon, succeeds in wearing down the resistance of Clytemnestra, takes her to his house and solemnly celebrates his marriage with her. Later, Agamemnon returns, is decoyed into a banquet and ambushed there by Aegisthus and his men; Agamemnon perishes but not before he and his men have completely accounted for those on Aegisthus' side. Clytemnestra strikes Cassandra down in an adjacent room so that her agonized cries reach the ears of the dying king. Here Clytemnestra is certainly not inactive, but Aegisthus is by far the more dominating figure; Clytemnestra is at least not the murderess of her husband. She helps Aegisthus with his plan—the role is reversed in Aeschylus.—who is seen as a tenacious adventurer bent on possessing also the gold (and usurping the power) of Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra is not the determined character she is in Aeschylus (une femme honnête, mais sans volonté). She takes no part in the murder of Agamemnon. Orestes therefore murders not Clytemnestra, but Aegisthus, the sole criminal, who has robbed his king of his wife, throne and wealth ("le seul criminel.. qui a volé la femme de son roi, en même temps que son trône et ses richesses"). With the murder of Aegisthus Clytemnestra retrieves her honoured position in her family. Soon however another and a different Clytemnestra appears in the legend who is the accomplice of Aegisthus or even devises the trap set for Agamemnon ("qui imagine le piège tendu à Agamemnon"). This Clytemnestra is at once unfaithful and jealous ("une femme infidèle et jalouse à la fois"), kills the captive girl Cassandra, is the daughter of Tyndareus, the evil angel of Agamemnon, as Helen, her sister, is the evil genius of Menelaus.<sup>18</sup>

It cannot perhaps be ascertained for certain now as to who first made Clytemnestra the murderess of her husband—it is not in Homer—but, as Prof. Maçon conjectures, this "innovation" may have occurred at the same

time as that of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, so that the turn the legend takes is not the wife murdering her husband, but the mother avenging her daughter's sacrifice. The legend had thus its modifications and additions to lend it psychological validity. The idea of criminal "heredite" weighing upon the two families of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra appears to owe its origin to the same need.

These details make it clear that Aeschylus could and did make his own choice of facts and traits of the characters he presents in this play of *Agamemnon*; no less in the case of Clytemnestra than in that of Agamemnon; and that the Clytemnestra of his play acquires a complexity verging on obscurity, is not so well integrated as she might have been is most probably because the earlier version<sup>s</sup> of the legend, also present in the mind of the dramatist, must have exerted at least an unconscious influence and determined to some extent the shape his Clytemnestra ultimately tends to take. In other words, the idea that Clytemnestra might have been basically a good woman—une femme honnête—soured by her life with Agamemnon (but not Aeschylus' Agamemnon) seems to have left some faint, though perhaps not convincing trace on her portraiture by our dramatist. And from this point of view her silence on more than one occasion acquires a meaning of its own. Prof. Kitto<sup>19</sup> has noted and offered dramatic justification for Cassandra's silence in the play, but not the equally significant silence of Clytemnestra (which however Prof. Murray adequately notes in the stage-directions he adds to the text of his English rendering of the play). Might not these moments of silence be *in posse* those of not only respite from action, but of momentary reaction and reflection? It is these moments of silence which lend some semblance of the human touch to this otherwise cold and demoniac nature, and invest her personality with an inscrutability and fascination more than where she is blatantly self-assertive, though in fact they perhaps were moments of quiet observation and fresh planning, of her putting herself together, allowing herself a breathing space, but, in the process, also of being in a mood of less tension, even of comparative relaxation and relief. The first such silence occurs immediately after the announcement of the beacon-light seen by the Watchman. There is some silent "ceremony"<sup>20</sup> and then the imaginative outburst of her startling "beacon-speech." When, again, Agamemnon on his return home offered his thanks and respects to the gods, Clytemnestra was standing silently by. How did her mind work then? The last, perhaps the most significant, moment of silence occurs when Aegisthus bursts upon the scene of murder with a speech of triumph, and the heated duel of words between him and the Argive elders last for quite some time. All this time Clytemnestra is present but utters not a word till the

matter is about to take an ugly and violent turn, and then as if with a *coup de grace* she silences everybody and is impressively the "master" of the scene. There is in all this however the final impression of an unearthly cool efficiency about her; for example, in the most methodical, calculated expression of her mind with the touch of the infallible in it, at least something least to be expected normally in a woman. This touch of the man in this woman has not gone unmarked by at least some of the characters of the play; the Watchman referring to "a man's heart in a woman's breast" (*Ode gar kratei/gunaikos androboulon elpion kear*) and the Chorus addressing her:

Lady, thou surely hast a woman's heart

But a man's sense withal: (C)

(*Gunai, kat andra sephron euphronos legeis*)

But more intriguing than these moments of silence are three other moments in the play when we are tempted to feel elated at having discovered something human in this extraordinary character in a realization on her part of her human weakness or limitation, a touch of pity or compunction—in at least two of these moments one is easily led to think of Lady Macbeth and make a comparison—though, on closer scrutiny, the whole thing is found to be a fond illusion. The first such moment occurs immediately after she has been able to prevail upon her husband to tread "the embroidered beauty", the crimson tapestries. Things are moving her way; there is that deceitful expression of joy at her husband's return, when suddenly she turns her mind aside, as it were, and pours out a brief, fervent prayer to Zeus:

Zeu Zeu teleie, tas emas eukhas telei;

meloï de toi soi touper an melleis telein.

(Zeus, Zeus: Perfecter, perfect now my prayer,

And of Thine own high will be Perfecter!) (C)

Prof. Kitto rightly says that this "goes better into French than into English", and quotes the translation of Mazon:

Zeus, Zeus, par qui touts' acheve, acheve mes souhaits, et songe bien a l'œuvre que tu dois achever.<sup>21</sup>

This prayer of Clytemnestra at once reminds us of the scene where Lady Macbeth needing all her mental resources for the task ahead—murder of King Duncan—prays equally fervently to the "murdering ministers" to unsex her<sup>22</sup>, betraying through the prayer itself the woman in her which makes such a prayer for her an urgent need.

The second such moment, when with a characteristically imaginative vividness she visualizes the sufferings of the people of Troy at her fall at the hands of the Greeks—



(Her women in the dust about their slain,  
Husbands or brethren, and by dead old men  
Pale children who shall never more be free  
For all they loved on earth cry desolately...) (GM)

—She is uttering words of pity (and piety) which must be considered as words spoken completely out of character, as the character takes final shape in the play. We rather perceive here the dramatist decrying war by depicting its aftermath, the dramatist's own pity for the fallen finding a spontaneous and moving expression but put through the exigency of the dramatic design into the mouth of a character who otherwise least deserved to be its mouthpiece. The voice is the voice of Clytemnestra but the sentiment is the sentiment of Aeschylus. The last such moment of silence occurs at the very end of the play when she watches for a while, then intervenes and stops a possible outbreak of violence when the two threatening sides stand face to face and defy each other—Aegisthus on the one hand and the roused Argive elders on the other. She would not have any further bloodshed. Enough evil has already been there :

No, my dearest, do not so. Add no more to the train of wrong.  
To reap these many present wrongs is harvest enough of misery.  
*Enough of misery. Start no more. Our hands are red. (LM)*  
(pemones d' alis g' ; uparche meden ; emartometha.)

Do you catch Clytemnestra in a different mood here ? But just when we imagine to have a glimpse or sign of her possible redemption, she turns her back upon us with an unabashed expression of her future plan :

Pay no heed, Aegisthus, to these futile barkings.

*You and I,*

*Masters of this house, from now shall order all things well.*

. (ego)

kai su thesomen kratounte tonde domaton (kalos)

And the play comes to an end with the character unredeemed. Such a relapse as indicated in the last line of verse was dramatically necessary ; how otherwise could Orestes be justified in his matricide in the next play of the trilogy ? And logically, too, this is where she should find herself at the end of her guilty life and conduct—a self-complacent and callous indulgence in a further life of sin.

After this attempt to discover any human touch in the character, we may turn to an examination of the motives for her deed that she puts forward in self-exculpation with all the show of righteousness that a guilty mind can contrive.

On her husband's return when she meets him for the first time after ten long years, with great frankness and outspokenness, as she emphasizes

herself—

(I will no more hold it shame

To lay my passion bare before men's eyes...) (GM)

and in a most persuasive manner, she weaves a tale of the sorrow and suffering she had to go through during all these years she had been left alone in the Palace to fend for herself (which, as we know, she did with a vengeance). She was in an intolerably lonely and fearful situation and so much given to sorrowing that

The old stormy rivers of my grief are dead (GM)

Follows the carpet or tapestry-scene, which we have tried to analyse earlier, to be climaxed by the horror of the double murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra. And to meet the shock and warning of the Argive elders, Clytemnestra comes out with a torrent of words. Agamemnon she characterizes as "a damned hater, feigned a friend"—expressions which perfectly reflect her own position. The deed of murder, according to her,

.. is the finish of an ancient quarrel

Long brooded, and late come, but come at last. (C)

The exultation she openly avows after the deed is committed suggests no impersonal act of justice under divine directive, but one of a personal vendetta. She gives a stroke by stroke account almost of the murder climaxing with the description of how, when struck down, Agamemnon's blood splashed

Sweet, sweet as God's dear rain-drops ever blew

O'er a parched field, the day the buds are born ! (GM)

She glories in what she has done.

Then comes her mention of Iphigenia's sacrifice, which she refers to later again. By itself this episode is touching enough, but taken with her other complaints (and she *does* mix it up with other charges against Agamemnon), it loses its force and hardly appears to be a genuine motive for her act at all, though this reference to her daughter's cruel death has even been adduced by critics as an evidence of her tenderness. In theory, it is ; in actual fact, it is hardly so. When she briefly refers to the matter, her mind seems to be preoccupied with other thoughts, her *whole* mind is not in it ! Against the background of her conduct in the play, her words referring to Iphigenia—"the darling of my womb"—sound unconvincing. For immediately after speaking of her child in these terms, she turns lovingly to Aegisthus : she will have nothing to fear

So long as there is fire on my hearth

Aegisthus lights ; so long as he is my friend,

My ample buckler, my strong heart's true shield (C)

She has given herself completely, body and soul, over to Aegisthus. Is this

complete acceptance of Aegisthus in her life also an act of vengeance ? Or is there any natural aversion that she feels for Agamemnon who, compared with Aegisthus, appears hateful to her ? Unfaithful herself, she depicts Agamemnon as guilty of self-indulgence, and although this may not be a play of jealousy<sup>23</sup>, there is much feigning at least on Clytemnestra's part that she has detected ground for it in Agamemnon's conduct in Troy :

What should I fear, when fallen here I hold  
This foe, this scorner of his wife, this toy  
And fool of each Chryseis under Troy ;  
And there withal his soothsayer and slave,  
His chanting bed-fellow, his leman brave,  
Who rubbed the galleys' benches at his side. (GM)

It is quite likely that Clytemnestra all through is accusing her "enemy" of crimes which suit the image she desires to establish for the "benefit" of the friends of Agamemnon and possibly too as a salve to her conscience, if she had one. Our difficulty in taking Clytemnestra at her word is indeed great. In fact, no reader can miss the fundamental difference between the two characters, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, as Aeschylus draws them, which is that Agamemnon, whatever his fault(s) may be, is not deceitful as Clytemnestra by her own admission (and unashamedly) is<sup>24</sup> so that while we can easily trust the one, almost everything that the other says and does we cannot but view with suspicion and distrust.

Clytemnestra next claims that she acted as the instrument through which "that cursed Spirit" or "Wrath" has worked to punish the Tantalids, and not as Agamemnon's wife :

And criest thou still this deed hath been  
My work ? Nay, gaze, and have no thought  
That this is Agamemnon's queen.  
'Tis He, 'tis He, hath round him wrought  
This phantom of the dead man's wife ;  
He, the old Wrath, the Driver of man astray,  
Pursuer of Atreus for the feast defiled ;  
To assoil an ancient debt he hath paid this life ;  
A warrior and a crowned king this day  
Atones for a slain child.

We have already discussed this matter of *atoning for a dead child*, but there is no support in the Legend for the denigration of Agamemnon's character as Clytemnestra attempts nor for the suggestion, through her preference, that Aegisthus is a better character ; there is the smell of blood in Aegisthus' hand too. What, then, are the relevant particulars the Legend provides ?—The curse on the House of Atreus proceeds from Atreus' trea-

chery to Myrtilus, which can touch Agamemnon only through the law of heredity perhaps. But the iniquitous game within the family was started by the father of Aegisthus, Thyestes, who seduced Atreus' wife, Aerope, whence "the feast defiled" as Atreus' revenge for the wrong done to him. Aegisthus murdered Atreus, and placed his father on the throne. But this man, so favoured by Clytemnestra, was the son of Pelopia by her father Thyestes ; and, like father like son, Aegisthus seduced Clytemnestra, as his father had earlier seduced Aerope.

Such being the picture the Legend provides us with,—and Clytemnestra, pretending to know so much of the past of the House, may justifiably be held to know it too—Clytemnestra must be deluding herself, or trying to delude her audience when giving a version of the Legend which suited her well ; she cannot therefore be taken as talking about a genuine motive for her action when she refers to the *cursed Spirit* or *Wrath* as working through her to purify the house of her husband by egging her on to murder him. And so with her other reasons, too. When all her assertions are taken together, no clear picture emerges to explain her real motive for murdering her husband for the simple reason that she harps on so many, ( giving herself partially away in the process as when she refers more than once to her trust in and love for Aegisthus ) : her daughter's sacrifice, Agamemnon being scandalously self-indulgent in Troy, the captive-princess of Troy being one of his last loves, her being a Divine instrument in acting as she did to drive the Curse from the House of her husband—so that no one reason sounds convincing enough. The reader is left bewildered ( much as she herself perhaps was ) with a feeling of some kind of chaos in her own mind. There may have been present deep down in her mind some grievance which she did not, or did not like to, speak about in so many words but just glance at. First, before the murder, on first meeting Agamemnon on his return, she complained of her intolerably lonely life all these years. If this also is not one of her lies, is there a reflection here of her grievance, not spelt out, that her husband left her to herself and went all out to recover his sister-in-law, and her own sister,—( of whom nobody has anything good to say in the play )—whom she knew only too well and who was in no respect a better woman ? Was she stung by the indifference thus shown to her by her husband ? Or, had she detected some contempt for her in her husband's treatment of her which, we may suppose, comes out in the very first words he uses on his return to address her as "Leda's daughter"—( Leda's genethlon ) ? In the use of this expression ( and not "Tyndareus' daughter", which the Chorus once uses ) did Agamemnon betray his unconscious feeling that born of the same mother, though not of the same father, Clytemnestra shared her sister's wayward-

ness and perversity? And was her real motive for getting rid of her husband to liberate herself from the restraint she impatiently felt while living in the shadow of his towering and suspicious personality? The dramatist cannot be wasteful or careless in his use of words—and the expression "Leda's daughter"—was then deliberately put into the mouth of Agamemnon (*his first words of address to his wife*) by Aeschylus to reflect Agamemnon's reading of Clytemnestra's nature, but this reading was not a complete reading. There was something else in her equally strong—her pride (or vanity?). In this context some words, already quoted earlier, which she flings at her dead husband are worth more notice than they have perhaps received:

What should I fear, when fallen here I hold

This foe, *this scorner of his wife*,...

The key word in the Greek text (*outes gar emin aspis ou smikra thrasous*) appears to be the word "thrasous"<sup>25</sup>. In the present context the word "*thrasos*" is not of course in the good sense of "courage, confidence", but in the bad sense of "overboldness, daring, rashness, presumption, impudence" (Liddell & Scott); what for Agamemnon was a bearing of easy confidence and courage looked like an attitude of "presumption and impudence" to his wife: she was being taken too much for granted or perhaps ignored. The two minds were out of contact with each other, one brooding over it, the other not knowing, and not feeling the need to ascertain, what the matter was. Here, in this ignorance or indifference, it would seem, lay the "hamartia" of Agamemnon. This is never expressed in so many words by Clytemnestra herself except perhaps in the expression already quoted ("thrasous"), but breaks out in the inexplicable fury even when she had already done him (and not him only) to death. In this respect her words are less to be trusted where she tries explicitly to state her case, but more expressive is her whole bearing and conduct. The woman who was, by her own admission, dealing in lies before the murder could not suddenly turn an honest creature, full of tenderness for her child while faithless to her husband, doing a "heroic" act for the good of her husband's House. She was human only in the full possession of pride, jealousy, passion, perversity, treachery, some of which, esp. her perversity and treachery, must have been inborn with her as with her sister Helen.

#### IV

John Gassner<sup>26</sup> draws the natural distinction between the external form of a play determined by the conventions of a period, a play's "manifest content of ideas and attitudes" and the "inner form" of a play resulting from the dramatist's "choice, treatment, and arrangement of the events and

other dramatic elements" through which a glimpse of the dramatist's "vision" can be obtained. But, for a great dramatic creation like the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, this distinction is not enough. A dramatist may work through the contemporary stage conventions and attempt through an independent choice of materials and their treatment to project his vision, but the ultimate product may not be exactly what he bargained for. One character (or more) may come so much alive (but not alive in the way in which the dramatist would have it) that his design or vision may be disturbed or not fully achieved, and yet the dramatist may be so struck by the character's unpredictable behaviour and vitality that he has not the heart to cut it down to size to suit his strict dramatic purpose. This seems to have happened with the character of Clytemnestra. The character of Agamemnon too cannot of course be ignored. A good deal of sympathy and love obviously went to his creation too so that he is certainly not an "unattractive character", not even the arrogant person we read of in Homer, but one who can inspire spontaneous love and admiration in his people when alive, and for whom his people almost cry their heart out when dead. It is therefore not quite correct to say that Agamemnon "is given only as much character dimension as needed for the drama's argument." Agamemnon is not arrogance personified. Aeschylus, more generously inclined, begins his picture with the Watchman's spontaneous joy at the prospect of his "dear lord's" return and continues it till the very close of the play where the Argive Elders each of whom looked upon himself as.

"A babe, a dream stolen forth into day". (C)

go to the extent of defying Aegisthus for their "lord of spears" so brutally done to death, so overwhelming is their sorrow for him, so maddening their indignation at his cowardly plotting. And yet, Clytemnestra certainly apportions to herself comparatively more of her creator's attention and interest. Vengeance is of course her prime motive, but she herself complicates the issue by talking of too many things confusedly together. And this confusion may itself be born of a sense of guilt however violently she may disclaim it. If it were the mother grown furious over the sacrifice of her daughter, she could not at the same time declaim more than once her love for another man almost in the same breath. If it were not jealousy at all, she would not taunt her husband lying dead at her feet with her suspicion, and murder the captive Trojan princess impatiently with her husband. If she were the instrument of justice, that one reason should have sufficed. Aeschylus might not have started with the object of making a study of criminal psychology<sup>27</sup> in this play, but a criminal character or a character turned criminal at some point in the play must have gripped his attention. The result was Clytemnestra, a being unclear even to herself. And this

brings us to our concluding remark. However much we may quote chapter and verse to convince ourselves about the rightness or wrongness of the charge of *hybris* customarily brought against Agamemnon or to identify the *hamartia* for which he had to pay with his life or to put our finger on the true motive of Clytemnestra for her dastardly deed, the characters themselves loom much larger than their deeds and elude any sure grasp to hold them. These characters live. And it is they who with their almost endless suggestiveness keep occupying our mind long afterwards, and not Zeus 'ostis pot' estin, (whoever He is) or Apollo or Pan.

(Quotations are from the English renderings of Gilbert Murray (GM),  
Louis Macneice (LM) or G. M. Cookson (C))

#### NOTES & REFERENCES

1. Drama since 1939-(Longmans) p.7
2. Preface to the *Agamemnon* (Allen & Unwin)-p. vii
3. Drinkwater : Outline of Literature-p. 131
4. All French quotations are from the valuable Preface of Prof. Paul Mazon to his French edition of the Greek text of the *Agamemnon* (Eschyle, Tome II) (Collection des Universités de France)
5. In fairness to Prof. Murray the whole of the relevant passage should be quoted from his Preface to the *Agamemnon* (p. xli) :  

"...I suspect that Aeschylus, a believer in the mystic meaning of names, took the name Agamemnon to be a warning that *Aga mimnei*, "the unseen Wrath abides." *Aga*, of course, is not exactly wrath ; it is more like Nemesis, the feeling that something is *agan*, "too much", the condemnation of *Hubris* (pride or overgrowth) and of all things that are in excess. *Aga* is sometimes called "the jealousy of God", but such a translation is not happy.  
 It is not the jealousy, nor even the indignation, of a personal God, but the profound repudiation and reversal of hubris which is the very law of the Cosmos. Through all the triumph of conqueror, this *Aga* abides."
6. "O, Earth, Earth, Earth I would God I had lain dead  
 Deep in thy mould,  
 Ere on his silver-sided Pallet-bed  
 I saw my lord lie cold ! (C)
7. For example, *Form and Meaning in Drama*, p. 17
8. His calling the gods his partners (tous emoi metaitlous) ; Agamemnon being called *poluktonos* : *ton poluktonon gar ouk askopoi theol*.
9. "ton poluktonon gar ouk askopoi theol."
10. The words that come spontaneously to Clytemnestra's lips on her victory, here may almost be said to be symbolic of her own mind-*Estin thalassa—tis de nin katas-besai* (There is the sea-its caverns who shall drain ?)
11. Story patterns in Greek tragedy (Athlone Press)
12. Ibid. p.23

13. Ibid. p.86 (Notes)
14. *Oresteia* : Dramatic form and vision (J. Gassner)-p. 263 in *Varieties of literary experience*—Ed. Stanley Burnshaw.
15. Greek Tragedy, p. 68 (15a) *Aristotle's Poetics*-PP. 376-99
16. Eschyle, Tome II (Mazon)
17. Ibid. Agamemnon's 'æede' and Aegisthus 'guetteur' appear transformed as Aeschylus, Watchman stationed on the roof of Agamemnon's Palace.
18. Ibid. All the French quotations are from the Preface.
19. Form and Meaning in Drama.-p. 27
20. A point made by Lattimore in his *Story patterns in Greek Tragedy*.
21. Quoted by Prof. Kitto : Form and Meaning In Drama.-p.14.
22. The telling economy of Clytemnestra's prayer makes that of Lady Macbeth appear by comparison rhetorical and verbose.
23. *Oresteia* : Dramatic form and vision (J. Gassner)-p. 262
24. "Oh, lies enough and more have I this day Spoken, which now I shame not to unsay." (GM)
25. The line has been variously translated :
  - (a) This foe, this scorner of his wife...(GM)
  - (b) He's dead that had the lust of her,...(C) ;
  - (c) The man who outraged me lies here,...(LM) ;

The rendering of Murray appears to come nearest to the spirit Clytemnestra's words convey.
26. *Oresteia* : Dramatic form and vision-p.259
27. Ibid.-p.262



# THE KNIGHT'S TALE

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JHARNA SANYAL

The subtle and complex variation in the problem of appearance and reality in the context of the medieval social tradition seems to be one of the interesting suggestions in the characterization of Chaucer's Knight's Tale.

Palamon and Arcite are studies in contrast, and contrast was perhaps the only method by which Chaucer could create a real-life atmosphere in the highly formal and stylized setting of the tale. From the very outset the poet emphatically points out the difference between these two theban Knights who emerge from the same social ethos and share the same cultural heritage. Palamon is the maudlin hero of the courtly love tradition, and Arcite is the practical man of reason and common sense who in his actions and reactions is more an anticipation of the future, the Renaissance, than a continuation of the past. He is absolutely free from the cloying sentimentalism of Palamon. What exalts him far above Palamon and concretes his hero's pedestal is his selfless love for his cousin and his wholehearted generosity. It is only for an Arcite to say to an Emily—

"and if that evere ye shul been a wif

Foryet not Palamon, the gentil man."


What has been said so far about Palamon is no doubt true. Whether we see him from the medieval or the modern point of view, he is sentimental, emotional and passionate. But it perhaps would be a sort of anachronism if we go so far as to condemn Palamon for all his excesses of passion which are in strict conformity to the courtly love tradition. He is the typical medieval Knight who falls down on his knees to worship his love. He is so typical of his age that the description of the young courtly figure, the squire, in the Prologue seems to fit him exactly—

"so hoot he lovede that by nyghtertale

He slepe ra moore than dooth a nyghtingale."

As a character, Palamon is simple—his words and deeds wholly express his emotional reactions. He is direct, straight forward and at times naive. Because of this essential simplicity he does not feel the necessity of camouflaging his emotions as Arcite does. Arcite's external behaviour is not always a close reflection of his genuine emotions, and this makes the character deceptive and complex.

At the sight of Emily, Palamon in complete accordance to tradition, falls down on his knees and adores her as a goddess. With simple faith in his



cousin he calls him to see Emily. There is much scope for doubt, whether Arcite would have done as much if he had been the first to observe. Shrewd and calculating as he is, he would have anticipated the effect of such a beauty on his so emotional and passionate cousin.

However, Arcite has no romantic illusion about reality. Emily, therefore appears to him as a woman of flesh and blood, to be wooed and won. He has Chanticleer's male vanity without his foolishness, while Palamon seems to share the foolishness of Chanticleer though not the male vanity.

Arcites protestation of love naturally enrages Palamon, who in vain tries to hold Arcite back on the terms of their row,—

Neither of us in love to hindre oother, besides all other things. Foolishly still, he tries to establish his right by the childish argument that it was he who saw her first. As expected these common place, illogical arguments avail not. Arcite himself may not have much faith in tradition but he is fully aware that love for a woman is initially expressed through idolatry. In fact according to the courtly—etiquette, love itself is a ritual and looking upon the woman as a goddess and worshipping her is an essential part of that tradition. But Arcite pretends profound ignorance. His claim that—"For Paramour I loved her first er thou" is therefore a superb fraud and no logic at all. This is obvious hypocrisy because the same Arcite, when alone after his release, echoes the typical sentiment of a devotee and not of a lover when he admits ;

"Only the sight of hir, whom that I serve,  
Though that I nevere hir grace may deserve,  
Wolde han suffised right ynough for me".

But no pretension can help him out when the charge is more serious, when he has to justify his breach of promise. Though apparently a non-conformist, Arcite himself being a part of the same moral atmosphere in which Palamon is brought up, cannot ignore the sanctity of the vow, nor deny the validity of Palamon's claim. Thus being cornered, it remains for him to revolt against tradition which hinders him,—

"I pose that thou lovedest hir biforn ;  
Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe,  
That who shall yeve a lovemaan lawe ?  
Love is a greter lawe, by my Pan,  
Than may be yeve of any erthly man ;  
And therefore positif lawe and swich decree  
Is broken al day for love, in ech degree."

The argument here is more like that of an obstinate adolescent determined to gain his ends, by means fair or foul. Such fervent passionate and

illogical argument more becomes a Palamon than an Arcite. Yet, Arcite is typically himself, when instead of being swept away by the momentary fit of passion he wakes up to reality and realises that the woman, for whom they quarrel is beyond their reach, and from the practical point of view it is wiser to keep good terms with the only companion in confinement. Therefore comes his conciliatory speech, so wise and condescending :

Love if thee list ; for I love and ay shall ;  
And soothly, leeve brother. this is al.  
Here in this prisoun moote we endure  
And everich of us take his aventure.

At heart Arcite is as medieval in his jealousy, in his passion and sentiments as Palamon. Had he been thoroughly unsentimental, and rational as he is supposed to be, he would have rejoiced at his unexpected release, because that would, inspite of the condition imposed by Theseus, provide him with some chance to win Emily. The same expectation is voiced by Palamon—

Thou mayst, sin thou hast wisdom and manhede  
Assemblen alle the folk of oure kinrede,  
And make a werre so sharpe on this citee,  
That by som aventure, or som tretée,  
Thou mayst have her to lady and to wif, ..

Arcite's pretensions were so perfect and habitual that even Palamon his cousin and friend, fails to read him aright. Arcite does nothing of the sort. Instead

He wepeth, wailleth, crieth pitously  
To sleen himself he wailleth prively.

Worse still, the so generous Arcite of the end, is meanly jealous of imprisoned Palamon !

Thin is the victorye of this aventure,  
Ful blisfully in prisoun maystow dure ;

... ..

Wel hath Fortune yturned thee the dis  
That has the sight of hir, and I th' absēce

He shows the same sighing sentimentality as Palamon in his "Farewell my lif, my lust, and my gladnesse".

In the grove when Arcite recounts his miseries, he addresses Juno and says ! How longe,...

Woltow werreyen Thekeo the citee ?

After his patriotic consideration he switches over to—

"...the wretched Palamoun, That Theseus martyreth in prisoun". And then he adds :

And over al this, to sleen me outrelly,  
Love hath his firy dart so brenningly

Ystiked through my trewe, careful herte ;

The introductory and over all this

Shows that love is an added burden to the first and main two, that vex him. Judged by the events that precede and follow, this is a piece of another deliberate pretension. Had it been true, had love been a subordinate issue, Arcite after his release would have availed himself of the chance of restoring Thebes and freeing Palamon instead of "languishing daylong" and "crying out in Pain". The fact that he is as passionate as Palamon is proved by the description of how

His sleep, his mete, his drinke is him biraft,

That lene he wexeth, and drye as is a shaft.

His eyen holwe, and grisly to bihold.

His hewe falow, and pale as asshen colde, ..

... ..

So fæble cek were hise spirits, and so lowe,

And chaunged so, that no man colud knowe

His speche nor his vois, though men it herde.

Had he been that patriotic he would not have stooped so low as to accept a position in disguise in the service of Theseus. Had he loved his friend that earnestly he would not have fought with him for Emily, instead of helping him to flee. So whatever he might profess, love is the primary concern with Arcite.

Now, the question might arise : while apparently alone in the grove, before whom should Arcite pretend ? This pretension in isolation, or rather, this self-deception reveals the duality in Arcite's character. Palamon is the true medieval knight steeped deep in the courtly love tradition. His intensity of emotions obliterates all other objects and consideration. Though Arcite is equally passionate, he is keenly aware of the reality and his obligations to it. He is fully aware of what he should have done and what he is actually doing. He arranges the problems as he should have preferred them in real life. He thus tries to ease his conscience by pretending to believe that the ideal situation is real.

Neither should we make much of Arcite's refusal to fight with his unarmed cousin. This is not an act of extra-generosity on Arcite's part. Being a medieval Knight he had to follow the contemporary code of chivalry which considers it unknighly to fight a weapon-less man. Here he exploits the tradition which he can with equal alacrity flout for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.

Palamon yet is jealous and mean. But that too in the manner of a simpleton. When he finds that there is no escape, he like a child caught in an act of mischief, confesses his guilt unasked and points out the

accomplice as well. Yet, never for once does he try to evade the guilt at the expense of Arcite, nor beg the mercy of Theseus, as he says :

Ne yeve us neither mercy he refuge,  
But sle me first, for seinte charitee :  
But sle me felawe cek as well as me.

If he is mean, he is also outspoken and sincere, and within the tradition.

Both Arcite and Palamon are primarily lovers. But it is necessary that even as lovers, they should be distinguished. Arcite perhaps is more eligible as a husband, he is the practical and rational lover who does not forget that it is Mars whom he should pray to, because success in war could only win Emily. It is a matter of personal opinion as to how far Palamon is preferable as a husband. Yet, the fact that he is more genuine and whole-hearted as a lover, is proved by his choice of Venus. Is it because of that that Diana thinks it fit that Emily should marry Palamon ?

The master-stroke of Arcite's duplicity perhaps lies towards the end, when he, a moment before his death, advises Emily that if ever she has to marry, she must choose Palamon. But is it as selfless a generosity as it seems ? If he was so intent on Emily's marrying Palamon, what need had he to profess so passionately :

Alas, min hertes queen I all as, my wif !  
Min hertes lady, endere of my lif !

After so piteously 'bequeathing' the service of his ghost to Emily and theatrically addressing her as his heart's queen and wife, he with large-hearted generosity permits Emily, who, after such passionate and poignant protestations of love is as good as his widow, to marry Palamon. Even at this critical juncture he does not forget to add the hypothetical—"And if that ever ye shul been a wif", as if he anticipates that Emily would never more choose to be a wife. So, when Arcite finds that he has lost his case, as ill luck would have it, he characteristically enough, tries to make the best of a bad bargain. The King and the courtiers would never forget how generously the dying man forgave his foe. Even if Emily and Palamon were married, as they are after several years, Emily would never forget that it was Arcite who won the tournament, called her his wife and it was she who performed his obsequies. The shadows of the past with flashes of what could have been would yet blacken the unsatisfactory present of what has been. Palamon too would never forget that it was for the generosity of his friend that he has Emily for his wife. Arcite perhaps would stand between the couple, just as the shadow of the first wife hyphenates a couple in one of Tagore's stories.

Arcite as a character is more complex than Palamon, who is traditional and therefore simple and easily explainable. Arcite with his deliberate

pretensions and hypocrisy closely parallels some of the pilgrims of the Prologue. This element of hypocrisy is bound to be present in characters who are intelligent enough to see through the apparent manifestations of reality and do not hesitate to exploit the innocence of others. There may be a shrewd suspicion that had Arcite grown old he too would have looked upon love as a glorious facade and would not hesitate to exploit it even for political gains, as Theseus did. Palamon, as long as he would live, would exist as a testimony to Arcite's generosity.

The human mind being so complex and Chaucer being so non-committal, it is rather difficult to be sure of any such arbitrary character-exposition which may be more in the nature of imposition than interpretation. However, it is also true, as Professor Spiers points out, that Chaucer's poetry, "belongs to that impersonal realm in which works of art" may take effect from the minds different ages may meet.

# JOHN WEBSTER : THE MAN OF LAW

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APURBA KUMAR SANYAL

John Webster is essentially a man of law. The moral-immoral controversy regarding him has been fought on many grounds. Kingsley, Ian Jack, L.G. Salingar have taken up the cudgel against him while Swinburne, Ribner and Gunby have been his staunch supporters. Though there is a massive sense of evil in his plays, there is also an equally massive confrontation against this Evil with Webster's conception of Law. This spirit of law is a central conception with him. Webster's basis is very moral and the theme of Law helps to build up this moral fabric. Uptill now, no critic except Ralph Berry has drawn our attention to this central problem. Leaving aside the controversial issue of co-authorship, we can concentrate on the three plays which are entirely his own.

The charge of decadence is a long-standing one in the case of John Webster. The lack of ethical coherence or moral focus was brought by Charles Kingsley a century earlier. "The strength of Webster's confessed mastership lies simply in his acquaintance with vicious nature in general. ...Was the art of which this was the highest manifestation likely to be of much use to mankind?" It has often been repeated, in our days too. Thus for instance, we have Ian Jack finds no connection between the moral sententiae which have been woven in the dramatic frame-work without any purpose"... this background of moral doctrine has nothing to do with the action of the plays : so far from growing out of the action, it has all the marks of having been superimposed by the poet..... This dissociation is the fundamental flaw in Webster".<sup>2</sup> L. G. Salingar very recently has carried on this onslaught against Webster. "Haunted by his predecessors' conception of moral law, he can neither accept nor amend it ; in a world he sees as corrupt through and through, he can only exploit his own discomfort".<sup>3</sup>

The critics finding a moralistic, bias in Webster, like Swinburne, have gone to the length of saying : "There is no poet morally nobler than Webster".<sup>4</sup> They too have not made the basis of morality adequately convincing. For instance—D.C. Gunby equates the *Duchess of Malfi* with a work on theodicy. It was not general moral theorising or contemporary theology that prompted Webster to a moral vision. The supreme importance of Law thrusts on him a central moral problem and

from its confrontation with the problem of evil emerges the essential structure of the three Websterian plays.

Some modern critics like Harriett Hawkins have questioned the very basis of the moral theme in dramatic appreciation specially of the Jacobean period. "So often the seventeenth-century drama seems much braver than some twentieth century criticism of it ; for where the drama challenges conventional social and moral assumptions, certain modern critics tend to swallow them whole".<sup>5</sup> The tension between the problem of evil and the Law often has the appearance of a 'challenge to conventional moral assumption' and out of this tension emerges Webster's final vision, which after all is a moral vision in the ultimate analysis. And Law has played a central role in building this vision.

All the three dramas carry the themes of service, reward, payment, justice, revenge, storm, punishment. These terms coming often literally as in *The Devil's Law Case* or in images and image-clusters as in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* can very well be reduced to the central theme of Law.

The opening remark of Lodovico with the word 'Banish' t' in *The White Devil* and the preoccupation with the theme of reward and punishment in the first scene have led critics like Travis Bogard to look up to the whole drama from this viewpoint. "The spectacle of courtly reward and punishment has run its course ; the horrors are summed up ; the courtly way of life is seen without illusion".<sup>6</sup> And actually it is so. 'Banish' is the motto-theme ; Lodovico pulls up the situation so that punishment is rejected but at the end of the play come the rack and the gallows and the torturing-wheel : it is punishment accepted.

Lodovico inveighs against law at the beginning :

Ha, ha, O Democritus thy Gods  
That govern the whole world I Courtly reward  
And punishment. Fortune's a right whore  
If she give ought, she deals it in small parcels,  
That she may take away all at one swoop (l. i. 2-6)  
But Antonelli, cold and  
judicious intervenes, 'Come  
my Lord, / you are justly doom'd' (l. i. 12-13)

Lodovico has committed murders. But when accosted by Gasparo he makes fun of it "Las they were flea bitings :

Why took they not my head then ?" (l. i. 32-33)

He will not heed the warnings of Gasparo :

The law doth sometimes mediate, thinks it good  
Not ever to steep violent sins in blood—



This gentle penance may both end your crimes,  
And in the example better these bad times.

Lodovico turns a deaf ear to this advice. Later Monticelso's good advice forbidding murder meets the same fate :

'Miserable creature I

If thou persist in this, 'tis damnable.  
Dost thou imagine thou canst slide on blood  
And not be tainted with a shameful fall ?  
Or like the black, and melancholic yew tree,  
Dost think to root thyself in dead men's graves,  
And yet to prosper ?

(IV. iii. 117-23)

Lodovico always shifts the responsibility to some one else, to some chance occasions or enemies but at the fag-end he accepts full responsibility for his acts.

Omissions and commissions

I do glory yet,

That I can call this act mine own

(V. vi. 295—6)

The final note is of perfect acceptance

For my part,

The rack, the gallows and the torturing wheel

Shal be but sound sleeps to me, here's my rest—

"I limb'd this night-piece and it was my best"

(V. vi. 296—9)

The same holds true for Paulo Ursini, Duke of Brachiano. The infatuated Duke strives to put his 'White Devil' 'above scandal' and 'Above the law.' Vittoria cannot evade human law, nor even that of the fates. She is forced to the House of Convertites and 'welcomes death' (V. vi. 220) in the long last. Brachiano hires a poisoner to murder his duchess by saying 'It shall enforce a payment' (II. ii. 54). The payment is enforced, but the engineer is hoist with his own petar. He accepts his responsibility of the crime 'Indeed I am to blame'.

(V. iii. 87).

Vittoria, with her 'innocence-resembling boldness', as Lamb puts it, rejects the charges hurled against her. The real framework of the charge is really moral and not legal. The legal charge she refutes with acumen and agility, but apart from this public arraignment, in her inward heart of hearts she is herself aware of a moral sin as she herself admits.

and I do wish

That I could make you full Executor

To all my sins—

(IV, ii. 125—7)

Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, BK I specifically defined Divine and Human Law. "(i) the laws of the divine Being itself which governs all things (ii) natural law, working through the unconscious, unthinking operations ..(iii) a law celestial and heavenly...(iv) a law of Reason that which bindeth creatures reasonable in the world. (v) "that which..... is not known but by special revelation from God, Divine Law (vi) Human law, that which out of the law either of reason or of God, men probably gathering to be expedient, they make it a law."<sup>7</sup>

She can extricate herself from the human law which pertains to a public affair, but the framework of law which Webster has in mind has a greater concept. That is perhaps the Number one of Hooker's list. This law is impregnable and in a way Vittoria ironically accepts her responsibility, though here rather unconsciously. 'O my greatest sin lay in my blood' (V. vi. 240) and 'Now my blood pays for it. (V. vi. 241). This is the No. 1 manifesting itself through the operation of No. 2 of Hooker's list.


Flaminco is almost a symbolic figure of reward, payment and retribution. He is absolutely prepared to go to any length for his career and the word 'payment' is always on his lips. He looks lightly on Marcello as Marcello's virtue has paid him ill.

What hast got

But like the wealth of Captain, a poor handful  
Which in thy palm thou bear'st, as men hold water—  
Seeking to grip it fast, the frail reward

Steals through thy fingers. (III. i. 41—5)

His greatest reaction to his sister's disgrace is 'Is this the end of service?' (III. iii. 3)

His complaint to the English Ambassador is couched in the same vein. 

Here they sell justice with those weights  
They press men to death with. O horrible

Salary I (III. iii. 26—8)

Social intercourse for him is a commercial transaction. Like Barabbas of Marlowe, everything, everyman's, honesty and every woman's has a fixed price; Flaminco, like his predecessor tries to sell men as dearly and to buy others as cheaply as possible. "The moral issue is the simple choice between folly and knavery."<sup>8</sup> But Knavery in the long run does not pay either for his sister, or for him. In his cynical manner he disclaims responsibility but shifts it to fate but admits that its course is inexorable.

Fate's a spaniel,

We cannot beat it from us. (V. vi. 178—9)

The Storm image is a Stock image in the verse of Webster; it whips up the theme of crime and retribution. Lodovico, Flaminco, Vittoria herself all echo

it in a number of occasions. Human Law is fallible. As the White Devil gets almost scot-free, the law cannot punish but grimaces at her but natural law as in the manifestation of the storm is more consistent and above all Divine Law which according to Hooker "governs all things" is inexorable. This Law, or ineluctable fate whichever name we may give it, rules the life of Vittoria Corombona. Man's actions set in a train of reactions and like Newton's Second Law of Motion every action has its equal and proportionate reaction. Human justice is fallible but the inexorable process of providence or fate working through retribution is working eternally.

In the next drama, *The Duchess of Malfi*, Webster relentlessly carries on the theme of Law, though it is not the heart of the matter as in the earlier play or in *The Devil's Law Case*.

At the beginning Antonio harps on the theme of 'Virtue is its own reward', whether there be 'heaven or hell'.

Were there nor heaven, nor hell,  
I should be honest : I have long serv'd virtue,  
And nev'r tane wages of her.

(I, i. 504—5)

So also at the fag end Julia in her dying speech speaks of 'Justice' (V. ii. 308). Ferdinand stands for the Law only in name and falls with a crash, Bosola brings back the old familiar salary, payment, reward-punishment imagery. In the opening act, he growls at the Cardinal at the first opportunity 'I have done you better service than to be slighted thus : miserable age, where only the reward of 'doing well, is the doing of it.' (I. i. 32—4). With a Donnian metaphysical imagery for Antonio and Delio, he complains.

'There are rewards for hawks, and dogs, when they have done  
us service ; but for a soldier, that hazards his limbs in a battle  
nothing but a kind of geometry is his last supportation' (I. i. 59—63)

It is almost the repetition of the Lodovico episode of *The White Devil*. Like Lodovico, Bosola has committed murder and both of them have to reap their own harvest. They get their real 'reward' in death. Justice is meted out to them. Bosola in his turn metes out justice to Ferdinand who is a Corruptor of Law

Delio. Then the Law to him  
Is like a foul black cob-web, to a spider—  
He makes it his dwelling, and a prison  
To entangle those shall feed him

Antonio. Most True :  
He never pays debts, unless they be shrowed turns  
And those he will confess that doth owe

(I. i. 179—86)

Bosola flatters the Duchess of Malfi and asserts

For know an honest statesman to a Prince  
Is like a Cedar, planted by a spring,  
The Spring bathes the tree's root, the grateful tree  
Rewards it with his shadow : You have not done so.

(III. ii. 303—6)

Though unconsciously said, not to wrest the truth by 'intelligencing', the secret comes out, and when the Malcontent speaks it has the true ring of a moral reward and recognition to a really deserving man, so seldom to be found in Neapolitan/Jacobean England.

Do not I dream ? Can this ambitious age  
Have so much goodness in't, as to prefer  
A man merely for worth : without these shadows  
Of wealth, and painted honours ? possible ?

Act IV, Sc. ii is the anagnorisis of the drama and it may well be termed 'The Arraignment of Bosola'. Ferdinand has suddenly come upon the truth that he has got his sister murdered whom he loved and Bosola has also murdered to get his reward which goes by nought. The issue for both of them is pure justice. They cross swords with each other in purely legal jargon and the sparks that fly out of this legal battle have a thematic unity revolving the central motive of Law.

Bosola. I challenge  
the reward due to my service.

Ferdinand. I'll tell thee.  
What I'll give thee—

Bosola. Do.

Ferdinand. I'll give thee a pardon for this murder.

Bosola. Ha !

Ferdinand. Yes : and 'tis  
The largest bounty I can study to do thee  
By what authority didst thou execute  
This bloody sentence ?

Bosola. By yours—

Ferdinand. Mine ? Was I her judge ?  
Did any ceremonial form of Law,  
Doom her to not-Being ? did a complete Jury  
Deliver her conviction up i' the Court ?  
Where shalt thou find this judgement registered  
Unless in hell ? See : like a bloody fool  
Th' hast forfeited thy life, and thou shalt die for't

Bosola. The office of Justice is perverted quite

When one Thief hangs another : who shall dare  
To reveal this ?

Ferdinand. Oh, I'll tell thee :  
The wolf shall find her Grave and scrape it up :  
Not to devour the Corpse, but to discover  
The horrid murder.

Bosola. You ; not I shall quake for't.

Ferdinand. Leave me.

Bosola. I will first receive my pension.

Ferdinand. You are a villain.

Bosola. When your ingratitude  
Is judge, I am so—

Ferdinand. O horror !  
That not the fear of him which bind the devils  
Can prescribe man obedience  
Never look upon me more. (IV. ii. 312—43)

The intellectual crossing of the swords has an entirely legal image and different levels of law and their interplay have been searchingly analysed in this scuffle. Ferdinand on whom there is a sudden moral reawakening, a revelation, so to say, suddenly turns into a Spokesman of the Divine Law while materialist Bosola still speaks of the Human Law : the law of contract. But both are made to undergo the inexorable law of retribution. Bosola's stark disappointment followed by death is exemplified by the lycanthropy of Ferdinand. He ends by howling like a wolf. Like Bacon, Webster could also say 'Revenge is a kind of wild justice'. For Bosola himself perceives the judgement that has fallen on Ferdinand.

Mercy upon me, what a fatal judgement  
Hath fallen upon this Ferdinand (V. ii. 83—4)

Bosola's charge to the Cardinal has also this legal bias.

When thou kill'dst thy sister,  
Thou tookst from Justice her most equal balance  
And left her naught but her sword (V. v. 52—5)

The Cardinal admits the justice of his punishment at the hands of Bosola, who is now the scourge-stick of Justice.

Oh Justice :

I suffer now, for what hate former been  
"Sorrow is held the eldest child of Sin". (V. v. 72—4)

While killing Ferdinand, Bosola says :

'Now my revenge is perfect.  
.....The last part of my life,  
Hath done me best service'. (V. v. 81—3)

While Bosola also lies dying, the Cardinal has his last laugh 'Thou hast thy payment too' to Bosola. (V. v. 93)

The idea of Justice remains even in the last words of Bosola.

Let worthy minds never stagger in distrust

To suffer death, or shame, for what is just.

The Wheel of Law has come full circle. The natural, human and divine Laws are inexorable in their operations against man's erring actions and wilfully—a Bosola or a Cardinal has to accept it.

*The Devil's Law-Case* is the last of the series and was written when tragedy was on the wane and a new genre-tragi-comedy was coming to the fore with Fletcher as its champion. As Fletcher himself defines the genre<sup>8</sup>

It wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make no comedy.<sup>9</sup>

Like Fletcher, we find here extreme emotional conflicts, unexpected reversals of fortune and arbitrary final settlements, but through them all runs the thread of Law which weaves an intricate pattern out of this chaotic mass and gives it a thematic unity. Upto Act IV the tone of the play is quite tragic, but as the canons of the genre dictate, the dramatist has to treat tragedy in terms of comedy and there is the unfortunate "blurring of the tragic and the comic".<sup>10</sup>

But Webster might have intended this juxtaposition for the baroque manifestation of his style as Ralph Berry argues.<sup>11</sup> Here the law-element is really the heart of the matter as the play's very title signifies. So the references to law are more literal than metaphorical.

Here the transgression of law and its confrontation with evil are quite sinister and could have been painted in dark lineaments like Jonson's *Volpone* or Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. But a lighter mood prevails and the problem "would seem to require an accommodation rather than a solution"<sup>12</sup> as Gunnar Boklund wryly comments. But the tone is set more by the zeitgeist, the spirit of the time, than by the dramatist's temperament. As Ellis-Fermor opines, " .. the tension of the first decade began to relax .... The horror is resolutely put aside, the great questions rest untouched except as debating topics .... the end is saved from catastrophe by a mood that gave us clearly to know from the outset that catastrophe was never really imminent".<sup>13</sup>

So here tragedy is cut down to every-day size and the moral evil has been equated in more commercial and materialistic terms. Gold is the major metaphor of evil and the travesties of justice, natural, moral and divine, have all been punished in monetary metaphors. Like Jonson's *Volpone* or Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, the gold image plays a major role.

In the latter play *Lucre*, *Hood* and *Moneylove* execute a dance like the dance of the seven deadly sins. So *Law's Injunctions* here are all coming from the money-base. "This aversion (of money) was deep-rooted in the Middle ages. It was based ideally on the Aristotelian precept that precept that money in itself is valueless and morally on the verse in St. Luke's Gospel :

Mutuuum date nihil inde sperantes.

and this survived in the 15th century and "we are confronted with the survival of a moralistic attitude to economic life which had previously characterized the society".<sup>14</sup>

In the first scene of the first Act we are made to know that wealth creates rank but it destroys natural relationship. *Contarino* and *Ercole*—both suitors are noble, but the scale, according to *Romelio*, should tilt in favour of *Ercole* because he is both noble and rich. *Jolenta* should never marry for love for which she gets the curse of her mother *Leonora*.

The legal 'contract' comes easily to *Romelio* whose whole life-base is centering round 'money' and 'interest'.

Keep your possession, you have the dore bith' ring

That's Livery and Season in England (I. ii. 145—6)

But that it is against natural law is voiced by the unsophisticated *Winifred*.

Plague on these

Unsanctified Matches, they make us both

The most natural desire our grandame *Eve* ever left us.

Force one to marry against their will I—why 'tis

A more ungodly work, than enclosing the Commons.

(I. ii. 226—30)

Here the human law does duty for the divine and morality is equated in economic terms. The economic injustice of the closing of the common pastures is equated with the immoral match-making against the ward's wish.

The dark tone of the drama is set also in legal terms even by love-laden *Jolenta*. Consider her dialogue with *Contarino* :

*Jolenta*. Reach me the caskanet, I am studying, Sir,  
To take an Inventory of all that's mine.

*Contarino*. What to do with it Lady ?

*Jolenta*. To make you a deed of gift.

*Contarino*. That's done already : you are all mine.

*Winifred*. Yes, but the Devil would fain put in for's share,  
In likeness of a separation.

*Jolenta*. Oh, Sir, I am bewicht.

*Contarino*. Ha ?

Jolenta. Most certain, I am forespoken,  
 To be married to another : can you ever think  
 That I shall ever thrive in't ? Am I not then bewicht ?  
 (I. ii. 246—57)

The lady-love speaks in purely legal terms, but Winifred who might be taken as Webster's mouthpiece here speaks of another aspect of moral law—that of natural conduct.

Get you instantly to bed together—  
 Do, and I think no Civil Lawyer for his fee  
 Can give you better counsel. (I. ii. 299—301) -

In the next act, the operations of Civil law in their various modes find expression in Crispiano, Sanitonella and Aristo. The latter alone holds up the decency of law and may be looked upon as the point of reference in the whole play where the law imagery dominates.

Crispiano. There he stands, but a little piece of flesh,  
 But he is the very miracle of a lawyer,  
 One that persuades men to peace and compounds  
 quarrels

Among his neighbours, without going to law.

Sanitonella. And is he a lawyer ?

Crispiano. Yes, and will give counsel  
 In honest causes gratia—never in his life  
 Took fee, but he came and spake for't is a man  
 Of extreme practice, and yet all his longing  
 Is to become a Judge.

Sanitonella. Indeed that's a rare longing with men of his profession  
 I think he'll prove the miracle of a lawyer indeed.

(II. i. 107—18)

This 'miracle lawyer' is rather superstitious and does not like the unfortunate names : The Storm's Defiance, The Scourge of the Sea, The Great Leviathan, The Cargo-Ships of Romelio. Romelio undercuts his superstition.

I am persuaded there came not cuckolds enow  
 To the first launching of them, and 'twas that  
 Made them thrive the worse for't, O,  
 Your cuckold's handsel is pray'd for i the' City I

(II. iii. 69—74)

'Handsel' is the first money taken by a trader in the morning, thought to fetch a good fortune when taken from a cuckold. Sin arising from money and sex confronts the stern spirit of the Law. Leonora also wants Ercole back 'To come to his trial, to satisfy the Law'. (II. iii. 184)



The crimes committed by the chief actors are manifold and justice should take its own course.

In the third act, Romelio makes the transgression and violates the supreme law 'Thou shalt not kill', by wounding the already wounded Contarino. But here also the motive is money.

O, he may alter's will  
Every new moon if he please ; to prevent which,  
I must put in a strong caveat.

(III. ii. 90—93)

The Surgeons with their 'policy for a hundred double Duckets' also portray a sordid picture : the filth of lucre, evil and corrupted law. Jolenta finds herself in a fix with 'lawyers', 'pre-contracts', 'heirs' but she is ready to give in to the fantastic plan of Romelio which gives out that she carries the child of Ercole. As it stems from a 'precontract', there is no scope for scandal. Though no civil law is violated, Divine law is. And then the issue runs from her hand to her mother's.

Oh Jealousy,  
How villent, especially in women,  
How often has it rais'd the devil up  
In form of a law-case.

(III. iii. 215—18).

Leonora tries to avenge the death of Contarino on her own son. But what revenge her commercial son can understand excepting commerce ? So the terms of the revenge-plan also follow an economic, money-based course. Romelio's whole social fabric is based on that money-centre.

Leonora. Stay, you will mourne  
For Contarino ?  
Romelio. Oh by all means, 'tis fit—  
My sister is his heir.

The fourth act completes the triptych of the trial scenes in Webster's plays, if we take Act IV. Sc. ii as the trial Scene of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Bad Suits, and not the Law, bred the Law's shame

Shouts Ariosto and this is the only silver lining in an otherwise cloud-cast Neopolitan Jacobean sky. Romelio has to undergo the charge of bastardry brought by his own mother. The charge may not amount to much to such an one as Romelio—but it completely robs him of his essential life-base, which in commercial term is his banking. This goldman is judged in financial and not legal or human terms. When Contilupo says to Romelio

What title shall I set to this base coin  
He has no name',

The irony is very deep-rooted, Romelio's outburst against bastardry seems also ironical as he himself has fathered a bastard on Angiolella.

The Judge Crispiano brings the charge against Leonora as an offence against natural law.

We observe

Obedience of creatures to the Law of Nature

Is the stay of the whole world : here that Law is broke.

(IV. ii. 275—78)

So Civil natural and the Supreme i. e. Divine Laws are violated.

How many ills spring from Adultery !

First, the Supreme Law that is violated,

Nobility of stain'd with Bastardy,

Inheritance of Land fals'ly possest,

The husband scor'd, wife sham'd and babes unblest.

(IV. ii. 482—6)

Crispiano's name is mentioned as a witness and he relinquishes his charge to Ariosto. 'Truth will out in spite of the Devil' comments Winifrid (IV. ii. 517) and the coming out of the truth and its final reckoning with Law form the subject-matter of the final act. In the final act everything heads towards a tragedy but as in the *Merchant of Venice* and later in *Measure for Measure*, the tragic contours dissolve, so also in Act V of *The Devils Law-Case*. As the chief motive of the *dramatis personae* was money, they are all punished by law in financial terms—they would maintain galleys and build monasteries and practise gratis for twelve months. This is very small punishment for the floutings of the Civil, Natural and Divine Law. But poor Ariosto, and for that matter Webster, could do no better in the existing Jacobean circumstances, specially in the Fletcherian hey-day. This is finely hinted by the helpless outcry of Ariosto.

So we leave you,

Wishing your future life may make good use

Of these events, since that these passages,

Which threaten'd ruin, built on rotten ground

Are with success beyond our wishes crown'd.

(V. v. 98—102)

So there also we find Webster's moral vision acting through the medium of law. It is almost thwarted justice and being 'The Man of Law' as Webster is, he feels very much ill-at-ease with the success which after all is 'beyond our wishes'. Though conditioned by the terms of the genre itself, Webster sticks to his gun and proves his moral thesis through the vision of Law. We agree with D. C. Gunby when he says about the drama that it is 'a thesis play and provided with a didactically directed plot and characters...'<sup>16</sup>

NOTES

1. Charles Kingsley, *Plays and Puritans*, (London, 1873), p. 53.
2. Ian Jack, 'The Case of John Webster', *Scrutiny* xvi (1949), 39.
3. L. G. Sallinger, 'Tourney and The Tragedy of Revenge' In *The Age of Shakespeare*, ed. Boris Ford (Penguin 1956), p. 353.
4. A. C. Swinburne, *John Webster*, (*Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 19, No. 112, 1886, p. 871).
5. Harriett Hawkes, *Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama* (Oxford, 1972) p. 17.
6. Travis Bogard, *The Tragical Satire of John Webster*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956) pp. 127-8.
7. Geoffrey Bullough, 'Donne: The Man of Law', in *Just So Much Honor*, ed. Peter A. Fiore, (University Park and London, 1972) p. 94.
8. Harry Levin, *The Overreacher* (Gloucester, Mass, 1974), p. 80.
9. *The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher*, ed. W. W. Greg, (London, 1908) Vol. III, p. 18.
10. M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1935), p. 240.
11. Ralph Berry, *The Art of John Webster* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 151-4.
12. Gunnar Boklund, 'The Devil's Law-Case—an end or a Beginning', in *John Webster*, ed. Brian Morris (London, 1970), p. 128.
13. Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama* (London, 1936), p. 25-6.
14. Federico Chatod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, (London, 1958) p. 186-7.
15. Ives, 'The Law and the Lawyers', in *Shakespeare Survey* 17 (1964), p. 73-86.
16. D. C. Gunby, 'The Devil's Law-Case: An Interpretation', in *Modern Language Review*—xiii (1968), p. 558.

# MILTON AND LOVE POETRY

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It is believed by most Milton-scholars that love poetry did not suit Milton temperamentally and they illustrate from the major works of Milton to show that Milton wrote no poem where passionate love is the subject<sup>1</sup> : This might have been accepted, had there been no attempt on Milton's part to write love poems at the beginning of his literary career. That he initially liked to write love poems and they temperamentally did suit him are evident from these poems.

After a thorough survey of Milton's complete poetical works, one is at a loss how to evaluate these love poems, which are apparently so inconsistent with the rest of his works. A poet's real temperament may not remain the same all along, but may change along with his education and experiences. Some critics do not consider these factors and call these love poems of Milton as mere experiments of literary conventions.<sup>2,3</sup> But the intimate tone of the poems demands a serious attention to the origin of them.

These love poems are composed towards the beginning of Milton's literary career. They include the first six sonnets coupled with *Song On May Morning*. The date of composition is between 1630 and 1632 i. e. when Milton was 21-23. Excepting the first one, which is the 'Nightingale Sonnet', the other five sonnets are in Italian.

*On May Morning* is like a prelude to the chain of these love poems. It welcomes the spring time in a very easy and artless vigour, reminding one of the country folk songs or the Elizabethan lyrics : "Hail bounteous May that dost inspire Mirth and Youth, and Warm desire".

In the '*Nightingale Sonnet*', the true atmosphere of love is created by the Nightingale, who fills the heart of lovers with fresh hope. Milton calls himself a servant of 'Muse' and 'Love' and hence a friend to the Nightingale. In reference to the cuckoo, an association with 'Cuckoldry' has been found out by J. L. Leivsay in "Milton Among Nightingales"<sup>4</sup>. Thus the otherside of love, i.e. hatred or betrayal, is also anticipated. E. M. W. Tillyard is of the opinion that this poem "must be considered along with the six Italian poems, a conjugation by which it gains greatly in significance"<sup>5</sup>.

As for the Italian sonnets, Tillyard calls them the expression of real experience "...Milton", says Tillyard, "towards the end of his college career, and probably at the age of twenty one, was paying some kind of court to a

lady". This lady has been identified as an Italian singer, Emilia by name. Probably his "*Elegia Septima*" is also the expression of the same experience, as David Daiches points out.<sup>6</sup>

It is a very strange matter that Milton opened up his heart more frankly in foreign languages like Latin and Italian than in his native tongue English. According to Daiches, Milton wrote jolly love poems in Italian, but whenever he expressed himself in English he became rather formal.<sup>6</sup> Side by side with his Italian love sonnets, he has written English poems of solemn mood and verbal restraint, like the *Nativity Ode*, *The Passion*, *On Shakespear* etc. Here intellect and control over emotion, rather than emotional outburst and extravagance, play the dominating role and prove that these poems are not effortless. This suits the scholarly and serious Milton, as we know him better. But who can assure that this is Milton's true self? How can we ascertain whether Milton suppressed his real feeling because of several factors like his deep study, his involvement in the Reformation and his unfortunate marital connections?

That Milton was in the habit of avoiding emotional affairs like love is confessed by himself. "Diodati—and I shall tell these with wonder—my stubborn self, that was wont to despise love and often laughed at his snares, has now fallen where sometimes an upright man is entangled."

(Sonnet—IV—Translation by J. S. Smart).

In Sonnets I—VI and in the poem *Canzone*, Milton has frankly expressed his admiration and heartfelt passion for a rare beauty of foreign blood. Such frankness is unimaginable in Milton, the English poet. As for his frankness and spontaneity in the foreign tongue, no critic has attempted to give any reason thereof, perhaps because Milton himself has given the most obvious reason of it: My lady says, and her words are my heart, 'This is the language in which Love takes pride'.

(Canzone—Translation by J. S. Smart)

Surely, the romantic thought of Milton might always be associated with his dreamland, Italy: Diodati, his dearest friend, was an Italian: his first love, Emilia, was an Italian: the Italian sonneteer Della Casa was his inspiration. But other frank confessions of Milton's interest for the fair sex can be found in *Elegia Prima* and *Elegia Septima*, and they are not in Italian but in Latin, the language suitable for conveying serious thoughts. Thus Milton's own reasoning will not do here. We must try to find out for ourselves a suitable reason for Milton's choosing one foreign tongue after another to convey his intimate (and perhaps secret) feelings. A foreign language always provides one with a sort of veil, when one feels ashamed or rather uneasy to express something in one's mother tongue. Dr. John Broadbent, in his recent study on Milton's love affairs<sup>7</sup> has pointed out

that Milton suppressed his real feeling partly because of his austere academic life.

An attempt at suppression of the previous fickle feeling is evident in Sonnet VII, when we compare its restrained solemnity with the spontaneous and leisurely mood of the previous sonnets. In the octave, Milton seems to have deliberately kept the meaning ambiguous : it is difficult to catch at first what he implies by "my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th"—his love affair or his literary achievement ? It is not until the sestet that we are assured of Milton's real intention. This poem is like a landmark in Milton's love poems. Here he ends his fickle, emotional utterings and starts a new career, as it were. After this poem, there is no other love poem in any language written by Milton.

In *Elegia Sexta*, written three years earlier, Milton very significantly shows this sudden change of mood. He begins his poem with a description of festivities and dancing young girls, and praises wine as an inspiration for the lyric poets. But suddenly he changes his tone and describes some of the requirements of an epic poet.

"Their youth should pass in innocence. Secure from stain licentious, and in manners pure. Pure as the priest, when robed in white he stands. The fresh ustration ready in his hands."

(*Elegia Sexta* 63-6, Translation by Cowper)

But this does not fully justify Milton's addition of some anti-romantic and almost rude lines to his *Elegia Septima*, when it was published in his first collection of minor poems in 1645, when he was 36. Mentally, he might have been amply changed during these 17 years. But why should he try to deny his previous self, as if he is ashamed of his previous foolishness ? Only one explanation may clarify the problem : that by this time Milton was totally disillusioned about romantic love and youthful charm of the fair sex. Observe his expression :

Such were the trophies that, in earlier days,  
By vanity seduced, I toiled to raise,  
Studios, Yet indolent, and urged by youth,  
That worst of teachers, from the ways of truth ;  
Till learning taught me, in his shady bower,  
To quit love's servile yoke, and spurn his power.  
Then on a sudden, the fierce flame suppress,  
A forest continual settled on my breast,  
Whence Cupid fears his flame extinct to see,  
And Venus dreads a Diomed in me.

(*Elegia Septima*—Translation by Cowper)

Milton's treatment of Dalila and even Eve in some books of *Paradise Lost*

also imply the same kind of disillusionment about the fair sex, specially in connection with romantic love. It seems that at the age of 36, he felt a strange kind of dislike for, even a hatred against, romantic love.

Milton's personal life is the best guide to clarify this vagueness, though Milton's own writing never directly mentioned any of the experiences of his later life.

Milton was set free from the austere academic life for the first time, during the short period of rustication from Cambridge, when he was 17. He spent the spring of this year (1626) in London, and that in a very leisurely way. Now, for the first time in his life perhaps, he realised that he was a young man with human desires. Spring time, youth and leisure made a rare combination and Milton was excited with a strange kind of feeling which he expressed to Diodati in *Elegia Prima* :

Here many a virgin troop I may descry  
Like stars of mildest influence, gliding by  
Oh forms divine Oh looks that might inspire  
Even Jove himself, grown old, with young desire :

Bright locks, Love's golden snare I these feeling low,  
Those playing wanton O'er the graceful browl.  
Cheeks too, more winning sweet than after shower  
Adonis turned to Flora's favourite flower.

(Translation by Cowper)

At the age of 17, John Milton was much like other young men and was interested in beautiful young women as Tillyard has commented.<sup>5</sup>

This temporary phase in Milton's life was over soon and he went back to his austere Cambridge life.

Towards the end of his Cambridge life, i.e. when he was 21, he had fallen deeply in love with an Italian singer, Emilia. But this also was a passing phase in his life, having left no permanent mark on his mind. He expressed himself in Italian sonnets and *Canzone*. But after he took his M.A. degree, he became involved in the political world, with which romantic love has the least connection.

But this experience weakened a portion of his mind irrecoverably. After more than a decade, when he was 34, Milton went to Oxford to recover the money borrowed by Richard Powell. But he returned after a month or so (1643) with his bride, Mary Powell, the daughter of Richard. There has been no evidence that Milton had paid other visits to the Powells before this one and that he liked Mary Powell before this journey, though Tillyard has taken it for granted simply on the basis of his assumption, that Milton could not do anything rash by being "suddenly swept

away by an overwhelming wave of physical passion." But *it was rash*, as the consequence of the marriage showed later on. Mary Powell was just an ordinary young girl with physical beauty and fleshly appeal and with no idea or interest in the world of scholarship, which was Milton's spiritual abode. Had Milton known Mary for a long time, he might have realised this basic difference between themselves and might have foreseen the consequence of marriage between such a couple. Moreover, by this time he should have been mature enough to understand that this romantic frenzy would pass away as soon as he was in the world of books at London. The feeling of love, thus, was too intense in him at this time to let him think of anything practical. And most unpractically he married and brought the bride to his London home. There was no difficulty or trouble for Milton to plunge into the world of scholarship again, neglecting Mary, though unintentionally. Mary's loneliness told upon her mental peace; she almost began to grow an inferiority complex in her mind about her lack of education. At this time Mary's brothers came and took her to Oxford on pretext of her father's illness.

In spite of Milton's keenness about Mary's return, she did not come back. Instead, a severe letter from Richard Powell informed him that Mary would never be coming back. There is no literary witness of Milton's mental agony at this moment. Milton's education gave him superhuman power to suppress his emotional outbursts. But this perhaps was one of the greatest shocks of his life, because not only it affected his public fame but he surely had been disappointed in his expectation from Mary.

From Milton's most devoted student, his nephew Phillips, it is known that the first divorce tract, i. e. *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, was published in August 1, 1643<sup>5</sup>. Mary Powell deserted Milton on August 1, 1643. Thus, the tract was written before this date, i.e., while Mary was still in the house. This evidently proves that Milton was disillusioned about Mary for some other reason, most probably the disparity of their education and culture and her desertion only fanned the flame of Milton's anger. Milton, obviously did not get what he had expected from a wife. But he could not stand her disobedience, which was like an insult added to the injury, which he already had had.

Thus all was over with Milton's love affair. It is no matter that Mary came back two years later and had children by Milton. But those same romantic moments never came back. Milton was in the habit of suppressing his emotions; but emotions are living things as it were, which if suppressed for a long time die for ever. Milton's romantic love, thus, died for ever. It is at this time that he added some lines to his, *Elegia Septima*. After the death of Mary, he married twice. But at this time he was rather



aged and hardened by various bitter experiences of life. Besides, the colourful world meant nothing to him, as he was blind. Thus, neither Katherine Woodcock nor Elizabeth Minshull could be a romantic mate for Milton. Katherine was learned, and might have established an intellectual understanding with Milton. As for Elizabeth Minshull, she was a devoted nurse to the blind poet. But what is interesting is that no one excepting Mary Powell seems to have left a permanent impression on Milton's mind, as it is reflected through his literary creations.

About Sonnet 23, most popular opinion is that it refers to Milton's second wife, Katherine Woodcock, whom he married in November 1656 and who gave birth to a daughter in October 1657, and died in February 1658. R.W. Parker has tried to establish that the traditional view mainly depends on the assumption that Milton did not love Mary Powell any more after her desertion of him, but there is no ground to believe it. Parker's points are that 'Purification' mentioned in line 6 will not apply to Katherine, who did not die in childbed, but to Mary, who died of childbirth; that the controvertial phrase "once more" in line 7 is more applicable to Mary, whom Milton saw, than to Katherine whom he married after his blindness. Against the first point F. Pyle<sup>9</sup> suggests that usually purification after childbirth was done 66 days after the birth of the child, which could not be done for Mary who died three days after the birth of her child. For Katherine it was possible, E.S. Le Comte<sup>10</sup> has suggested that the origin of the name Katherine is a Greek word, "Katharos" which means 'pure'. Thus reference to 'purification' may include within itself the identity of the 'late espoused saint.'

F. Pyle<sup>9</sup> explains the phrase "once more" as "Milton, seeing her in his dream only, wants to see her once again in reality." 'Her face was veil'd' is explained as Milton being blind, and never having seen Katherine, could not make an image of her face. Among the modern scholars of Milton's sonnets, E. A. J. Honigmann<sup>11</sup> however, has voted for the traditional view that Katherine Woodcock is the "late espoused saint."

But what seems to be another illuminating side of the poem is that the mood and the tone of the poem are far from being dictated by passionate love. The writer seems to have a respect, almost a reverence, for the 'late espoused saint'. This Milton did not have for Mary who was much inferior to Milton in education and culture; who betrayed him once; and for whom Milton is said to have felt only sensual love. The emotional restraint and the pronounced respect for the lady in the poem, may naturally lead one to think that the lady is Katherine, who was learned and hence a suitable intellectual mate for Milton. The emotion which inspires the poem, seems to be so far from being conjugal love that Leo

Spitzer<sup>12</sup> found it shocking to imagine a particular wife 'a saint'. He interprets the 'saint' not as Milton's wife at all, but as his vision of the ideal. His interpretation, however, was not widely accepted for various reasons which are beyond our scope here. But the fact remains that Milton kept his poem away from the touch of sensual love, which he seemed to defy by this time. Selfish, sensual love associated with Mary comes back like a recurring musical note, even in his major works.

The vivid and sensual description of naked Eve in the garden of Eden cannot be drawn either from Katherine or from Elizabeth, whom Milton did not see at all :

Shee as a vail down to the slender waste  
Her unadorned golden tresses wore  
Disshēveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd  
As the vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd  
Subjection, but requ'r'd with gentler sway,  
And by her yeilded, by him best received,  
Yeilded with coy submission, modest pride,  
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.  
Nor those mysterious parts were then conceald,  
Then was not guiltie shame, dishonest shame  
Of natures works, honour dishonorable,  
Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd all mankind  
Which shows instead, meer shows of seeming pure,  
And banisht from nons life his happiest life,  
Simplicitie and spotless innocence"

(*Paradise Lost*, Book IV, 304-318)

The end of the passage is touched with Milton's regret that pure, divine love between man and woman has now turned to sensuality which is sinful. Sensual love brings anxiety instead of peace. In *Paradise Lost* Milton very strongly defies both sensual love or lust, and the formal artificial courtly love, in favour of guiltless sexuality of marital love, found in Adam and Eve before the Fall (Book IV). But much like the Sonnet on the *Late Espoused Saint*, this portion of *Paradise Lost* becomes solemn and passionless. John Carey's comment on this is interesting ; "They (i.e. Adam and Eve) enthuse about each other's charms. But this is simply a part of their experiences which Milton is disinclined to block in. The result is that a poem with two naked lovers walking about in it is completely unprovocative."<sup>1</sup>

Eve, inspite of her frailties, is an ideal wife to Adam. She is more idealised than realistic. She has the sweetness, meekness and modesty of Mary Powell, but her disobedience to her husband is unintentional,

unlike that of Mary to Milton, Moreover, her love is the purest form of love untarnished by sensuality and selfishness, which cannot be said about Mary's feeling for Milton. Modern biographers<sup>18</sup> of Milton assert that Mary could not share her husband's intellectual activities, and she wanted her husband's attention to be concentrated on her in the narrow domestic field. This not being done, she deserted Milton. Now, what was the sin of Dalila? "She wanted Samson at home and in her power. That was her way of loving him. It was a wrong way, but she is not lying in her account of it"<sup>19</sup>.

..... what if love, what if love, which thou interpret'st hate,  
 The jealousy of love, powerful of away  
 In human hearts, nor less in mine towards thee,  
 Caus'd what I did? I saw thee mutable  
 Of fancy, feard that one day thou wouldst leave me  
 As her at Timna, sought by all means therefore  
 How to endear, and hold thee to me firmest :

*Samson Agonistes* ; ll. 790-76.

Milton's acceptance of Mary a second time was only an act of kindness ; no more than that, as his added lines to *Elegia Septima* prove. Mary was sent to Milton by her father, because she being a Reformist's wife might endanger the position of her father as a Royalist. And she had no other place to go to.

Those who assume (like R W. Parker) that Milton and Mary Powell had a happy life after the latter's return, may be reminded of Milton's attitude to women in *Samson Agonistes* :

...Gods universal Law  
 Gave to the man despotic power  
 Over his female in drow awe,  
 Nor from that right to part an hour,  
 Smile she or lowre :  
 So shall he least confusion draw  
 On his wole life, not away'd  
 By female usurpation, nor dismay'd

11-1053-60

None but Mary among the wives had any difference of opinion with Milton. So, this association of bitterness with feminine charm may only be relevant to Mary. Like Samson, the creator of Samson too fell a victim to feminine charm and feminine wantonness. Both regretted it ever after. But none of them was initially unsusceptible to sensual love for the fair sex. But they were wrong in their choice. They did not meet romantic mates of their spiritual proportion, the sadness whereof

they carried up to the end of their career :

The virgine also shall on feastful days  
Visit his Tomb with flowers, only bewalling  
His lot unfortunate in nuptial choice'.....

*Samson Agonistes* (11 1741-43)

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# ON REVIVING AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE— CHARLES LAMB

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BONDONA MUKHERJEE

This second centenary of the birth of Charles Lamb occasions the recall of a very old and understanding friend. Lamb was loyal to his memories and used them as one of the basic ingredients of his writing. So were his personal acquaintances wont to reminisce affectionately on their friend in spite of all the vagaries of his mind, his little failings and foibles, his idiosyncrasies and complexes touched off by the blighted life, unpredictable and unusual, which he had to lead and from which he had a desire to escape into wine.

He was a much misunderstood man at times, for causes not always in his control. His future was jeopardised for reasons which is common knowledge to the world now. He suffered from physical failing and psychological aberration which put to the test his social endurance and stability. Yet the stretch of his mind was considerable and his integrity of character beyond doubt. With the help of these he was able to prove his salt by standing up to the test put to him by the gods and men.

Having to span an era spreading from one literary age to another is by itself a great pressure for a writer. He has to equate acquired traditions of upbringing with qualities and characteristics which belong to the temperament and insight, influenced by new directions. Lamb being one of the earliest Romantics became the product of such a conflict. We can feel the tension that results, in his writing. A sensitive mind that is eager to be lost in the wonders of the world, a mind in hunger to communicate with men and their manners, a mind that is impressionable enough to absorb the joys and the sorrows, he feels the lean and the scarce of an emotional harvest as the spontaneity of his mind is checked and made taut by the repressions of propriety and social inhibition acquired from the preceding age, without the benefit of the social stability that was a part of it. He feels it imperative to maintain a certain facade in his writing and thus unwittingly creates a gap between the appearance and the reality. Hence, between the biographer's reality and the emotional reality in his works the reader must make an effort to establish a link. Thus, though he makes little mention of the predominant curse of their family-life in his essays, he explains in his letters about the stigma of insanity from which he had to

suffer, with a sense of being "marked", as brother and sister were being hounded from lodging to lodging by prejudiced landlords. His loneliness and emotional stress begin right from here. He had to come to grips with life at a practical level, his poverty on the one hand and his extreme loneliness on the other; the four years of "struggling poverty" to which he alludes in his letters to Coleridge and Southey. In a letter to the former in the spring of 1800, he expresses his suffering as he practically reaches a breaking point. The old servant Hetty had just died as a result of which he says: "I am left alone in a house with nothing but Hetty's dead body to keep me company.. my heart is quite sunk"...Mary's relapses and the fact that everybody knows about them is not "the least of our evils"... "We are in a manner marked. Excuse my troubling you but I have nobody by me to speak to me...I am completely shipwrecked...I almost wish that Mary were dead."

But there is no cause for heartbreak, for he had one solid gift that could match more than was necessary, all the poverty and the melancholy. His abiding humour, with different levels of poignancy always came to his aid and enabled him not only to tide over his difficulties but became the most enriching quality of his writing. Thus he can afford to joke even about the harrowing incident referred to above. He says: "Tomorrow I bury her, and then I shall be quite alone with nothing but a cat to remind me that the house has been full of living beings like myself." What could convey more acutely the intensity of his mortifying loneliness?

As he changes house immediately after this and takes lodgings at the upper end of King's Bench Walks in the Temple, he writes to his friend Manning: "Like the country mouse that had tasted a little of urbane manners, I long to be nibbling my own cheese by my dear self, without the mouse-traps and time-traps. By my new plan I shall be as airy, up four pairs of stairs as in the country, and in a garden in the midst of enchanting (more than Mohammedan Paradise) London..." Knowing the pecuniary limitations of a petty clerk, we can appreciate the point of his humour. The remainder of this letter, however, explains partially, the secret of this tremendous power to laugh away the trials—the greater reward that he found in contemplating the joys of London, earthy and mundane though they were, and which he could transport to levels of real poetry: His "enchanting London" "whose dirtiest drab-frequented alley and her lowest-bowing tradesman, I wouldn't exchange for Skiddow, Helvellyn, James, Walter and the parson into the bargain. O, her lamps of a night, her rich goldsmiths, print-shops, toy-shops, mercers, hardware-men, pastry-cook's, St. Paul's Churchyard, the Strand, Exeter Change, Charing Cross, with the man upon the black horse. These are thy gods, O London!" This disproves

Colridge's statement that he had "Hungered after Nature, many a year  
In the great city pent..."

so that in spite of the "strange calamity" this London has appeared time and again in his essays although as a romantic he could not overlook the artificialities and repressions of city-life. "It is Lucretian pleasure" to behold the poor drudges whom "I have left behind in the world, carking and caring like horses in a mill..." he comments in the *Superannuated Man*. With equal irony he recalls the funeral atmosphere of London on a Sunday.

And, as a place to Lamb was never devoid of its people, remarkable are the insights into the smallest crevices of the littlest heart. Here is the personal element carried to the most redeeming degree. His own personal mortifications, sufferings and humiliation, his incapacities, hegations and privations, his infinitesimal joys and happinesses have all been used and employed to understand the most negligible person that could tread the earth. Without any of the pretensions of the exalted sublime, Lamb in his own way was contributing profoundly to illumine "Man, and the heart of Man."

Thus, we can account for the shades of happiness on the faces of the "emancipated 'prentices and little tradesfolks, with here and there a servant-maid that has got leave to go out, who slaving all the week, with the habit has lost the capacity of enjoying a free hour; and livelily expressing the hollowness of a day's pleasuring." In the same tone of seemingly casual regret, in an idiom that is cynically urbane he said "Why the devil am I never to have a chance of scribbling my own free thoughts, verse or prose again?"

In the "Chapter on Ears" Lamb humourises on people who make pretensions regarding music. After a duly witty and explanatory introduction regarding ears, by which he means an ear for music, he is pointing out the effects of trying to acquire forcibly a taste for music which can end up with an extremely opposite reaction which he humorously terms "scene turning." He then says that the evening parties at one of his friends always ended up with church music "who by the aid of a capital organ.. converts his drawing room into a chapel, his weekdays into Sundays and these latter into minor heavens..." I stagger under the weight of harmony reeling to and fro at my wits' end. the genius of his religion hath me in her toils a shadowy triple tiara invests the brow of my friend, late so naked, so ingenuous .... till the coming of the friendly suppertray dissipates the figment, and a draught of true Lutheran beer (in which chiefly my friend shows himself no bigot) at once reconciles me to the rationalities of a purer faith; and restores to me the genuine unterrifying aspects of my pleasantcounte-

nanced host and hostess." According to one of his trusted friends "H. C. R." though Lamb expressed himself often in an anti-religious language, he was a man of "natural piety" and his criticism was directed against the dogmatism of systematic theology. "He has the spirit of devotion in his heart." His knowledge and perception of human behaviour was also evident in his readings of his friends and associates. The following remark on a man whom he professed to admire, Mr. Clarkson, reveals a very intimate realisation of human failing which he had acquired at the cost of recurring personal suffering: "I have long looked on him rather as an abstraction than as an individual who is to be loved because he returns the love men bear to their equals. Clarkson is incapable of loving anyone except those to whom he has been a benefactor. He is so accustomed to serving that he cannot love those whose happiness he can no longer promote. As others are benevolent from vanity, he is made vain by beneficence." He recalls Coleridge too, assuming a patronising condescension towards him, referring to him as "the gentle-hearted Charles" which irritated him to the extent of a temporary severance of friendship. That is why he preferred Southey who could acknowledge him as an individual on his own terms.

Likewise he calls All-Fools' Day "the general festival" where man is to greet man universally 'we have all a touch of that same-you understand me-a speck of the motley.' How cleverly he makes a list of human frailties by one of the tenderest denigrations found in literature. In 'Imperfect Sympathies', he makes a confession of his "sympathies, apathies, antipathies" which is tantamount to saying that he is a lover of his species. Sympathy he defines as "to be a friend to a worthy man, who upon another account cannot be my mate or fellow. I cannot like all people alike." He then elaborates on human traits at different levels—national, professional, ideological. Talking of "The astonishing composure of people...sometimes ludicrously displayed in 'lighter instances'" he exposes Quakers conveniently retreating behind their facade of composure, in order to solve a problem of bills by just walking out and forgetting about it so completely as not to have any qualms of conscience afterwards, which Lamb says, "operated as a soporific on my moral feelings" also. In the same bantering tone he expostulated with the conditions of true gallantry which he found so rare in real life that he could forward a single instance only, the sole "pattern of consistent gallantry"—Joseph Paice of Bread Street Hill. In passing he makes minute perceptual comments on the appearance and reality that passes for "Modern Gallantry". In doing so he corroborated his own heart of a gentleman that could be committed to the looking after of a diseased sister, as opposed to the debonair John Lamb.



The curse of poverty and the mortifying consequential experiences could not be more good-humouredly summed up than in *A Complaint on the Decay of Beggars*. He would choose to be rather a beggar, he said, than what he was, because he could hardly do justice to the "Being" in him and so suffered and suffered all in silence. Equally revealing is his definition of a poor relation—"the most irrelevant thing in nature."

Fortunately for the writer, as his personality develops and matures, he is able to free himself from the shackles of an inhibition created by his temperamental sensitiveness and conventional repression. The later Elia stands a more liberated person both from self and society so that he is able to play the role of motley to the most significant degree. This is the taste and flavour conveyed by the later *Essays of Elia* and his other essays and writings although still under an assumed name. He not only gives free rein to himself as a writer but he has learnt the art of juxtaposing the personal and the general. Added to the insight and perception is expansiveness and comprehensiveness to the extent where the personal element reaches the greatest point of vindication. From this aspect, Lamb along with Dickens and Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, though of course in differing spheres, have given to personal facts a true universal significance. This change had already been indicated much earlier in his letters. "He is less sad and meditative" says Ainger, "and begins to exhibit that peculiar playfulness" which we associate with the future Elia.

As he pretends to make himself the butt of his criticism by assuming a confessional tone, and as the ridicule and the laughter is pointed at himself more and more Lamb is making us more aware of the single crying demand of his life—the "humane consideration" that he wants man to extend to his fellowmen particularly to the lesser and the more unfortunate amongst them. With a characteristic distaste for philanthropy, he does not want to make the same mistake of treating his fellowmen with condescension. He cries out for a greater awareness and sensitive treatment of the hurt feelings and uncontrollable impulses of men. To philanthropists and those who made a pretension of kindness he gave the name of "moral steam engine." At the same time he was averse to criticism that cut deep and made a person wince. "Sense of humour is extinct", he once said. "No satire but personal satire will succeed." His sense of charity can be proved from a single instance. When all his friends were annoyed with Hazlitt for his unwelcome comments on Wordsworth and had practically boycotted him, Lamb cut his friends by saying "Hazlitt does bad actions without being a bad man" and continued to be friendly with him.

Hence it can probably be said that he gave a new direction to satire by enlivening it with the yeast of his humour and sympathy and thus stretching it to the borders of the comic. A great instance in point would be his essay *Popular Fallacies* : That a Bully is always a Coward ; or That Ill-Gotten Gain Never Prospers ; or his use of the portrait of Mrs Conrady to prove that it is a fallacy to think that Handsome is that Handsome does.

In his letters under assumed signatures published in *The Reflector*, he sharpens the point of his criticism but turns the edge at himself. One such is *Edax on Appetite* which is "a case of the most iniquitous persecution that ever poor devil suffered." He works out a case of hunger which even when it is genuine, is contemptuously considered by those who have never been in its grip. With his flexible eclecticism, he piles name upon name from the Classics, humourously pretending that these are instances galore of this common human failing. This literary technique can only be compared with *Rosalind's* pretentious anti-romantic disparagement of love and its follies. Before he ends up the letter with a very humorous account of the supper that is laid out at a *Dowagers' card-party*, he is able to carry home his point "how can he be guilty of excess who never can get enough ? Let them cease, then, to watch my plate ; and leave off their ungracious comparisons of it to the seven baskets of fragments and the supernaturally replenished cup of *Baucis* ; and be thankful that their more phlegmatic stomachs, not their virtue, have saved them from the like reproaches." He flanks this with the tale of the lion making out a case for his love of flesh, from *Mandeville's Fable of the Bees* : "The Lion thus retorts : Savage I am ; but no creature can be called cruel but what either by malice or insensibility extinguishes his natural pity."

Then to that final heart's cry of *Elia*—*Confessions of a Drunkard*, questioning the "sturdy moralist" on his power of "compassion" and "human allowance which he mingles with his "disapprobation". Here is a whole truthful account of his constant failing, from its very inception, and its absolute admittance without any pretences at self-justification. He enumerates the treatment he received in the hands of men in his state of drunkenness as "the wages of buffoonery and death"—"to be an object of compassion to friends, of derision to foes."

Character-drawing came very naturally to Lamb with his power of observation and understanding. But he made something more than mere portrayal and we realise the art of the "lesser poet" in trying to correlate and synthesize the diverse aspects that make up life. I would like to recall once more Ainger's very felt assessment of the mainsprings of Lamb's

strength as a writer : "a serious and affectionate consciousness, whence grew a humility, a sensible acceptance of limitations of place and power, an unpretentious habit of transforming the things of the sense into the things of the imagination, a union of the temporary with the perpetual." About his own critical faculty Lamb had made the confession— "I can vehemently applaud, or perversely stickle at parts, but I cannot grasp at the whole." About his vision of life we can say he took it by parts and made up the whole.

Lamb was a prolific correspondent, his two chief recipients being Coleridge and Southey. The letters confirm a reality which is slurred over in the essays and poems which are in his own words "reflected images of my own feelings at different times." Whereas in the letters he confides everything to Coleridge, he does it because "I hate concealment and love to give a faithful journal of what passes within me." So these became a candidly reported though oft-repeated account and revelation of the family tragedy and the resultant suffering, the indifference of the brother, tension of the sister's recurring madness and his desperate bid to keep up his spirits in order not to be uncharitable to his dear Mary. He admits also his own fit of madness to which he looks back "with a gloomy kind of envy ; for, while it lasted, I had many, many hours of pure happiness." This happiness he never gained, his life being a constant oscillation between hope and fear—"Hope is a charming, lively, blue-eyed wench, and I am always glad of her company, but could dispense with the visitor she brings with her—her younger sister Fear, a white-livered, lily-cheeked bashful, palpitating, awkward hussy, that hangs like a green girl, at her sister's apron-strings, and will go with her whithersoever she goes." Here is the record of intense feeling and accurate portrayal. He was destined to be disappointed even with the event to which he looked forward all his life ; his discharge from India House with a pension. His friend H. Crabb Robinson gives this account of the event—"I found him and his sister in high spirits when I called to wish them joy on the 22nd of April. I never saw him so calmly cheerful as he seemed then. It is notorious this did not last."

So through the repeated cadences of a life which he lived as completely as life would let him, Lamb lived on till his death which followed too soon after that of his beloved friend Coleridge. "The friends of Lamb were not slow in giving expression to their sorrow for his loss, and their admiration of his character." Pondering on the sights of London he had once exclaimed on his twenty-sixth year "What must I have been doing all my life not to have lent great portions of my heart wth usury to such scenes ?" He retained the same attraction for the charms of his beloved

## SHELLEY'S DILEMMA IN *ALASTOR*

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AJOY RANJAN BISWAS

*Alastor* (written in 'a few serene hours'<sup>1</sup> of the autumn of 1815), Shelley's second long poem and admittedly his 'first serious attempt to interest the best feelings of the human heart'<sup>2</sup>, brings into focus a characteristic Romantic dilemma stemming from the Romantic poet's double allegiance to society and to his private vision of Beauty and also from the realization that while a balance between the two allegiances is almost impossible to achieve, an exclusive allegiance to either society or Beauty is self-defeating. The 'meaner spirits that dare to abjure' the 'dominion' of the vision of Beauty or the Imagination are doomed 'to a slow and poisonous decay'<sup>3</sup> or 'burn to the socket' with hearts 'dry as summer dust'<sup>4</sup>. The predicament of the visionary artist, on the other hand, consists in his total alienation from fellow-men who 'weave a circle round him thrice'.<sup>5</sup> Shelley's awareness of the predicament of the visionary seems to be more intimate and acute than Wordsworth's or Coleridge's, and he deals with it more extensively and focuses on it from various angles. 'The poet of *Alastor*', observes Welland, 'is the familiar Romantic figure, the solitary, whose heightened sensibility marks him off from ordinary men as surely as the curse on Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew of lines 675-81 and of the later *Hellas*, separates him from his kind.'<sup>6</sup>

Shelley's dilemma is evident even in his Preface which was admittedly written three months after the poem. The poem projects the tragic situation of an unnamed hero who is referred to as the Poet. Most of the critics fail to pinpoint Shelley's own dilemma and puzzle over the apparent inconsistencies in his interpretation of the Poet's situation or try to attribute them to certain absurd factors or oversimplify the problem itself. The title of the poem was suggested by his friend Peacock after the poem was completed when Shelley—as Peacock notes in his *Memoirs of Shelley*—was 'at a loss for a title'. The Greek word *alastor*, as meaning an evil spirit, was accepted by Shelley who was already well versed in Greek and who, therefore, was not unaware of the implications of characterizing 'the spirit of solitude' as evil. So O. W. Campbell's view that 'Shelley, in his preface, misinterprets his own poem'<sup>7</sup> is absurd. In Baker's view, again, the poem itself 'does not represent "solitude" as "evil", and while the first paragraph of the preface states the real situation of the poet, the

second paragraph contains Shelley's 'attempted explanation' of the poem 'in terms of the new title'<sup>8</sup>. This view seems to be based on an untenable assumption that the first paragraph was written before and the second after Peacock had suggested the title. In the first paragraph Shelley plainly describes how 'a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius' is led forth by an intense and pure imagination 'to the contemplation of the universe', 'drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate', and how suddenly his joyous self-possession gives way to a restless craving for intercourse with a kindred spirit whom 'he images to himself' as embodying 'all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture', and finally how his quest for 'a prototype of his conception' proves futile and fatal. Shelley presents this as a typical and interesting situation 'of the human mind'—not just as the unusual situation of a particular individual—and this is one of the reasons why the young hero remains nameless. The presentation of the situation therefore logically leads on to its interpretation, and it is here that Shelley finds himself in a dilemma. 'The picture', he says, 'is not barren of instruction to actual men'. Mrs Shelley in her note describes the poem as 'didactic'. Shelley seems to warn men against two kinds of selfishness. His condemnation of the one kind is distinctly pronounced: the 'destiny' of those who are 'deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge', and 'yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind' is 'abject and inglorious'. But his attitude to the other kind of selfishness, to 'the Poet's self-centred seclusion', seems to be rather undecided: on the one hand, such alienation from human society—Shelley warns us—is inevitably 'avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion'; and yet such alienated persons—Shelley points out—are 'the luminaries of the world', 'pure and tender-hearted' who only 'perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities'. He is intellectually convinced that the situation of the Poet is disastrous in consequence and so worth warning people against. But his emotional sympathy with the Poet is not at all concealed. And hence his moral hesitation. This dilemma is reflected in the poetic representation of the situation, and as a lyric ordinarily expresses the poet's emotion in an impassioned moment, Shelley's sympathy with the Poet naturally receives greater emphasis in the poem.

## II

The story of the Poet is preceded by an invocation (divided into two sections—11. 1-17; 18-49) in which Shelley deliberately uses the first person singular to mark off his own situation from that of the Poet. In

the first section he addresses the 'beloved brotherhood' of 'earth, ocean, air' calling upon them to continue their 'favour' to him in his new venture. He claims such favour in the name of his 'natural piety' that sets him in total sympathy with everything in nature, with all the phases of day and night and the seasons. The term 'natural piety' (borrowed from Wordsworth's lyric "My heart leaps up", where it refers to the childhood feeling of joy and exaltation at the sight of a rainbow) is used here in the sense of what Wordsworth calls 'primal sympathy' in the Immortality Ode and also implies a religious bond of love and sympathy inspired and established by the 'great Mother'. In the second section Shelley addresses this 'Great Parent', directly recounting how he has been led forth by his pure love for her to gaze 'on the depth/Of thy deep mysteries', and finally prays to her for inspiration :

.. serenely now  
 And moveless, as a long-forgotten lyre  
 Suspended in the solitary dom  
 Of some mysterious and deserted fane,  
 I wait the breath, Great Parent, that my strain  
 May modulate with the murmurs of the air,  
 And motions of the forests and the sea,  
 And voice of living beings, and woven hymns  
 Of night and day, and the deep heart of man.

(11. 41-49)

The invocation throws revealing light on Shelley's complex attitude to the predicament of the Poet. Indeed in these lines Shelley shows the essential affinity and difference between his own quest and the Poet's. O'Malley correctly notes that the invocation 'seems carefully designed to foreshadow a number of details in the hero's quest for knowledge and vision'.<sup>9</sup> From the description of the early career of the hero we gather that he has been a poet, like Shelley in the invocation, in total sympathy with 'every sight and sound from the vast earth and ambient air'. And just as Shelley watches the 'shadow' of the mysterious 'Mother of this unfathomable world' and follows 'the darkness of (her) steps.' so too the Poet 'Nature's most secret steps ..like her shadow has pursues'. Again, Shelley's 'obstinate questionings' (a phrase borrowed from Wordsworth's Immortality Ode) have led him into the regions of death ('chamels' and 'coffins') where he continues his search in the hope of inducing 'some lone ghost' 'to render up the tale/Of what we are'. And the Poet also visits the ruins of ancient civilizations, lingers in the 'ruined temples' of Ethiopia containing mysterious images and 'dead men' that 'hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around', and meditates day

and night :

...till meaning on his vacant mind  
 Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw  
 The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.

(11. 126-128)

Up to this stage, the tracks of the two poets' quest seem to run parallel, and then they diverge significantly. The quest of the two poets implies an attempt at transcending the world of common perception, at piercing the 'veil'. The Poet is seized with an irresistible desire to get hold of what lies beyond the 'veil' (i.e. the ideal, symbolised by 'veiled maid') or, in other words, to realize the unrealizable, but Shelley seems to be 'serenely' satisfied with the intuitive flashes, while the veil of ultimate reality remains unlifted :

...and, though ne'er yet  
 Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,  
 Enough from incommunicable dream,  
 And twilight phantasms, and deep noon-day thought,  
 Has shone within me,

(11. 37-41)

The Poet can be regarded as a tragic hero, and his *hamartia* (or tragic error) may be said to consist, at least partly, in his failure to serenely acquiesce in the unattainability of the ideal which is actually the projection of his 'epipsyche' (a term Shelley himself uses later to express the Platonic concept of a soul within the soul) :

He dreamed a veiled maid  
 Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones.  
 Her voice was like the voice of his own soul  
 Heard in the calm of thought.

(11. 151-154)

When on waking he does not find the maid at his side, he feels an intense yearning for her and starts on a mad search which he presses 'to a fatal extreme' and which 'amounts to an attempt to comprehend the infinite in a finite embodiment'<sup>10</sup>

The invocation serves in another way to mark off Shelley's situation from the Poet's. The 'great Mother' as conceived here appears to be a universal Spirit that holds the material and the human world—earth, ocean, air, and 'the deep heart of man'—within a sympathetic whole. It is thus suggested that human sympathy or the social instinct, which best expresses itself in the form of love, is an essential part of the universal harmony, and that an aberration in this respect on the part of an individual results in disharmony within and without. The Poet's whole life clearly illustrates

the tragic consequences of such an aberration. Shelley represents his own search into the mysteries of existence and the universe as an inclusive one ; he combines his 'most innocent love' with awe-inspiring prayers ('awful talk and asking looks'), 'breathless kisses' (the voluptuousness of youth and Spring, as in 11. 11-12) with 'strange tears' (religious emotion). It is this strange combination of human urges and spiritual emotion that characterizes Shelley's 'natural piety', and yet he cannot but sympathize with the aberrant Poet.

Shelley's dilemma is more acute in his representation of the 'great Mother', She is described in a language that strongly suggests her affinity with the 'Necessity' of *Queen Mab* ('Necessity ; thou mother of the world I —VI, 1. 198). Baker equates the two with particular reference to the fact that parts of *Queen Mab* were rewritten as *The Daemon of the World* and published in the *Alastor* volume. But Baker misses some of the obvious points of difference between the two. While Shelley prays to the 'great Mother' in the invocation with so much passion and expectation, Necessity is depicted as a totally impersonal principle that requires no human prayers and has neither love nor hatred, neither joy nor pain :

Unlike the God of human error, thou  
 Requir'st no prayers or praises : ...  
 No love, no hate thou cherishest ; revenge  
 And favouritism, and worst desire of fame  
 Thou know'st not : all that the wide world contains  
 Are but thy passive instruments, and thou  
 Regard'st them all with an impartial eye,  
 Whose joy or pain thy nature cannot feel,  
 Because thou hast not human sense,  
 Because thou art not human mind.

(VI—11.199-200, 212-219)

In *The Daemon of the World* Shelley calls her the Spirit of Nature with which every object and living thing is instinct : even the lightest quivering leaf and the meanest worm feeding on corpses in graves (Part I, 11. 180-185) seem to be chained to her spirit or law. In his "Notes on *Queen Mab*" he defines Necessity as a deterministic doctrine, according to which there is 'an immense and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects' in the composition of the universe, so that 'in no case could any event have happened otherwise than it did happen'. Baker traces this deterministic aspect of the doctrine in *Alastor*, and since the poem is 'primarily a picture of a state of mind', Necessity appears here 'in the form of psychological determinism' :



The youthful poet of *Alastor* could not have chosen to act otherwise than he does act : the inevitability of his fate is indeed, as we have seen, the fundamental implication of the poem.<sup>11</sup>

The way the 'veiled maid' visits the Poet in dream and the way he is driven to his death show a deterministic pattern which rules out freedom of choice on the part of the Poet. But Shelley does not represent the Poet as totally passive. 'Does the dark gate of death conduct to thy mysterious paradise, O Sleep?'—the Poet asks, stricken with an intense feeling of disappointment at the disappearance of the vision. But in the course of his voyage in a mysterious boat he discovers the path of the vision's departure and decides to follow her beyond death :

'Vision and Love I'  
The Poet cried aloud, 'I have beheld  
The path of thy departure. Sleep and death  
Shall not divide us long I'

(11. 166-169)

Before his fatal encounter with the 'veiled maid' the poet has been an imaginative youth freely choosing to undertake an adventure :

When early youth had passed, he left  
His cold fireside and alienated home  
To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.

(11. 75-77)

But afterwards most of his actions seem to be psychologically pre-determined. For example, he is led by a sudden death-wish to get into a boat :

A restless impulse urged him to embark  
And meet lone Death on the dear ocean's waste ;

(11. 304-305)

His action is impulsive, and when he *leaps* into the boat, he actually follows 'his eager soul'. He remains mostly passive, and the boat is driven at a tremendous speed by elemental forces or 'their genii' that seem to have been 'appointed to conduct him to the light of *those beloved eyes*'. He now seems to be inspired with a new hope of meeting the beloved vision.

Thus the deterministic pattern of the Poet's situation is not systematically developed, and the factor most responsible for it is Shelley's wavering attitude. So far the nature-spirit ('great Mother') has been identified with Necessity ; but with the appearance of the love-spirit (the vision of the 'veiled maid') the question of identification runs into difficulty. Which of the two spirits represents Necessity ? Examine the following lines, and Shelley's dilemma on the question will be evident :

A Spirit seemed  
 To stand beside him—clothed in no bright robes  
 Of shadowy silver or enshrining light,  
 Borrowed from ought the visible world affords  
 Of grace, or majesty, or mystery ;—  
 But, undulating woods, and silent well,  
 And leaping rivulet, and evening gloom  
 Now deepening the dark shades, for speech assuming,  
 Held commune with him, as if he and it  
 Were all that was,—Only....when his regard  
 Was raised by intense pensiveness,...two eyes,  
 Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought,  
 And seemed with their serene and azure smiles  
 To beckon him. Obedient to the light  
 That shone within his soul, he went, pursuing  
 The windings of the dell.

(11. 479-494)

Baker correctly observes that the first 'Spirit' is the 'great Mother' and the 'two starry eyes' belong to the 'veiled maid'. Shelley, he thinks, 'intends rather to represent two visions in conflict. One is the vision of a beneficent nature-spirit with which the poet communes until that vision is superseded by a second vision that 'draws him away from the consolations of inward calm which are tacitly offered by the first vision'.<sup>12</sup> And yet Baker equates Necessity with the nature-spirit. Can Necessity conceived by Shelley as the 'all-sufficing Power' be thus baffled in her attempt at communing with the Poet? Baker thus pushes himself into an absurd position vis-a-vis the question of locating Shelley's concept of Necessity in *Alastor*. Perhaps feeling uneasy about this position he later suggests in his Introduction to his book on Shelley that there are actually two kinds of Necessity in the poem—'the beneficent nature-spirit' of the invocation and 'the imperious psychological necessity of love, which is represented by the visionary maiden of Shelley's first nympholeptic myth'.<sup>13</sup> This explanation does further violence to Shelley's doctrine of Necessity which is primarily conceived as a unitary and self-sufficient principle.

The fact is that *Alastor* marks Shelley's transition from necessitarianism to a pantheistic vision which is partly akin to Wordsworth's but in a large measure foreshadows his later concept of the Intellectual Beauty. 'The Wordsworthian influence', observes Carl Gräbe, 'the pantheism of *Alastor*, is evident'.<sup>14</sup> The 'great Mother' is thus partly akin to the immanent spirit of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* :

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

Carl Grapo also points out that the shadow of this spirit which—Shelley says in the invocation—he has eagerly watched ‘suggests a Platonic idea not explicit in Wordsworth, the idea of the world of reality whose shadow is the world of actuality. of nature’.<sup>15</sup> The shadow of the ‘great Mother’ thus anticipates ‘the awful shadow’ of the Intellectual Beauty which suddenly thrills Shelley :

Sudden, thy shadow fell on me ;  
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy.

In *Alastor* the two concepts of Necessity and World Soul seem to be at war and Shelley is yet to reconcile them philosophically. Though both the concepts are Platonic in origin, Shelley in his “Notes on Queen Mab” refers to Holbach (*System de la Nature*), Godwin (*Political Justice*) and other eighteenth-century philosophers<sup>16</sup> as his immediate sources for the first concept. Plato represents Necessity, mother of the Fates, with a Spindle which itself was turned on her knees and ‘through which all the orbits were turned’.<sup>17</sup> And Shelley represents her as the Spirit of Nature, an all-sufficing and impersonal power which predetermines all thoughts and actions in the universe.<sup>18</sup> Gradually he thinks of the universe as a sentient organism, and then Necessity is no longer a materialistic concept but becomes a Power under the control of the World-Soul. And it is through love that the World-Soul controls both Necessity and the universe. The concept of the World-Soul has been in his mind since much earlier. In a letter to Hogg (January 3, 1811) he observes :

The word God...does not imply ‘the Soul of the Universe the intelligent & necessarily beneficent actuating principle’—This I believe in ; I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample are in themselves arguments more conclusive than any which can be adduced that some vast intellect animates Infinity.<sup>19</sup>

Necessity, as conceived in *Queen Mab*, is not necessarily a beneficent or harmful principle but a totally impartial law which impels every human being ‘to act precisely as he does act’ (Shelley’s Notes), and thus negates free will. But the concept of the World Soul as ruling both Necessity and the Universe admits of some amount of freedom of will for the human mind which is its microcosm.<sup>20</sup> But in *Alastor* Shelley is undecided as to whether to represent the ‘great Mother’ as Necessity or as the World Soul, whether to represent the Poet’s actions as predetermined or freely chosen,

and finally whether to subject the 'necessity of love' to the great Mother's control or to represent love as an independent power punishing a human being who dares defy her sway.

### III

Indeed, the crisis in the Poet's life seems to develop from his indifference to human love, and the epigraph from the *Confession of St. Augustine* is therefore, significant: 'I was not yet in love, and I was loving to love. I was seeking something to love, being in love with love.' This in a sense sums up the Poet's complex state of mind and attitude to love as well as Shelley's own intimate experience of the problem which he now treats in the poem only with half detachment.

The Poet appears to have been reared from infancy in an atmosphere of pure and brilliant vision. His mind has been enriched by the 'choicest impulses' from Nature as well as by the deep knowledge of divine philosophy and the best and loveliest things of the past. Yet insatiate he finds his fireside 'cold' and his home 'alienated',<sup>21</sup> and this separation from the family at an early stage of his search for deeper knowledge and truths foreshadows his total alienation from human society in the long run. His desire for secret correspondence with the soul of Nature and for 'strange truths' sends him wandering in waste lands and wilderness, in volcanoes and icy pinnacles, in lakes of bitumen and caves of diamond and gold beyond the reach of human avarice. He is in deep sympathy with Nature: savage men give him food, and doves, squirrels and antelopes are drawn towards him. The ruins of ancient civilizations reveal to him 'the thrilling secrets of the birth of time'. But in the course of this search for the secret truths and mysteries of Nature he has ignored love, an essential element of human nature. The Arab maidan who provides food to the Poet and tends him with deep care represents human love demanding satisfaction:

Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe  
To speak her love :--and watched his nightly sleep,  
Sleepless herself,...

(11. 133-135)

He wanders on totally indifferent to her love. This is a transgression against love, against human nature itself, because love 'is rather universal thirst for a communion not only of the senses, but of *our whole nature*, intellectual, imaginative and sensitive, (and) when individualized, becomes an imperious necessity, only to be satisfied by the complete or partial, actual or supposed fulfilment of its claims'.<sup>22</sup> The Poet's inability to respond to human love implies his 'self-centred seclusion' or total alienation from human society, and though a 'pure and tender-hearted' youth, he is

punished by the nemesis of 'an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin'.<sup>23</sup> The nemesis works out his punishment by suddenly awakening in his mind an irresistible desire for 'intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself'. This spirit appears to him in the form of the 'veiled maid' who is the projection of the Poet's own ideal of the finest faculties of intellect, imagination and sense combined together.. This is an unattainable ideal :

We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness,...the ideal prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man.... *a soul within our soul*...The discovery of its antitype ; the meeting with an *understanding* capable of clearly estimating our own ; an *imagination* which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret ; with a *frame* whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own ; and of a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands ; this is the invisible and *unattainable point* to which Love tends ; and to attain which, it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules.<sup>24</sup>

This passage from Shelley's essay (written in the same year as the poem) in which he expresses his theory of love derived from Plato (*Symposium* and *Phaedrus*) brings the Poet's situation into sharp focus. Particular reference ought to be made to the inversion of the Platonic of 'the ladder of love' in Shelley's thinking. Diotima (in *Symposium*) represents a hierarchy of love, starting from the lowest rung of beauty in an individual body and ascending step by step to the ultimate vision of ideal Beauty. But Shelley, in his Preface to *Alastor* as well as in his two essays referred to above (On Love and On the Literature etc. of the Athenians) mentions three stages—understanding, imagination and body,—and in the poem he represents the 'interaction' between the Poet and the 'veiled maid' at these three levels in exactly the same gradation.<sup>25</sup> In the context of the poem the inverted ladder-image showing physical union at the end (not as the aim) implies the totality of love and underlines the predicament of the Poet who has so far only cared to satisfy his intellectual and imaginative faculties. The vision has been sent by the 'spirit' of human love, and when the vision disappears, he feels a spiritual vacuum :

His wan eyes

Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly

As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven.  
The spirit of sweet human love has sent  
A vision to the sleep of him who spurned  
Her choicest gifts. He eagerly pursues  
Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade ;  
He overleaps the bounds. (11. 200-207)

The word 'spurned' is significant. There is no incident that suggests any violent and disdainful rejection of offers of love by the Poet ; he has only been absolutely indifferent. The word actually projects the bitter feelings of the spirit of love against the Poet, and so the vision that is sent to lure him into a quest for the unattainable and finally into death is the nemesis of neglected love.<sup>28</sup> It is his 'solitude' (implying total alienation) that has made him so fatally indifferent to human love and is, therefore, ultimately responsible for the tragic end :

He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude. (1. 60)

The word 'solitude' in 1. 414 suggests an intense feeling of loneliness, alienation even from natural beauty. It works almost like a spiritual curse that possesses his heart and stops him short of decking his hair with flowers. In 1.590 'Solitude' has a dual implication. By entering the secretest 'haunt' in Nature to make it his last bed, the Poet actually completes his alienation from human society. But this also gives him a sublimity :

One step,  
One human step alone, has ever broken  
The stillness of its solitude :—one voice  
Alone inspired its echoes.

(11. 588-591)

This underlines Shelley's dilemma. He knows 'the spirit of solitude' as evil, but he also discovers a plane of reality (he does not define it in so many words) in which alienation becomes sublime and which man can reach only when 'he overleaps the bounds' like the Poet. So his unsung, unmourmed death—Shelley feels—marks his elevation :

Art and eloquence,  
And all the shows o' the world are frail and vain  
To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade,  
It is a woe too deep for tears, when all  
Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,  
Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves  
Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,  
The passionate tumult of a clinging hope ;  
But pale despair and cold tranquillity,

Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,  
Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

(11. 710-720)

This is clearly a glorification of the Poet's fate, and therefore, apparently incompatible with the nemesis-motif. We have already noted Shelley's dilemma in the matter, and pointed out that while the nemesis-motif is more stressed upon in the Preface, in the poem his emotional sympathy for the Poet is more poignantly pronounced. This duality in his attitude to the Poet's situation results in a blurring of the intended effect of the poem or its didactic aim. The central idea which he wants to convey is that 'the completion which the poet seeks is to be found in human society rather than in nature' and that a vision of the ideal love is 'no substitute' for man's social instincts which are fundamental and which can be satisfied only by human love.<sup>27</sup> This is illustrated in his later assertion that 'man is in his wildest state a social being...never ceases to be a social being',<sup>28</sup> and also in his later definition of love as 'a going out of our own nature, an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or or person, *not our own*'.<sup>29</sup>

#### IV

But, does Shelley's emotional sympathy with the Poet suggest that 'the doomed quester is clearly the poem's maker'<sup>30</sup>? This assumption of Shelley's identity with the Poet which is often stretched to an absurd length is not very helpful in understanding the interesting situation of the human mind that Shelley so poignantly examines in the poem. Moore, for example, identifies the Arab maiden with Harriet, the 'veiled maid' with Mary and the Poet with Shelley, and interprets the poem as apology or allegorical explanation for Shelley's desertion of Harriet and elopement with Mary<sup>31</sup>. This interpretation ignores important facts: while the Poet does not even perceive the Arab maiden's love, Shelley remains absorbed in Harriet's love at least for two years (1811—1813); Mary embodies for him not the ideal love that would alienate him from humanity but the human love that satisfies both his social instincts and his love for the ideal and thus saves him from a self-defeating search for the ideal. Distinguishing *Alastor* from *Queen Mab* Mrs Shelley observes in her note on the poem that physical suffering and other misfortunes 'brought home to him the sad realities of life', caused him 'to turn his eyes inward' and 'brood over the thoughts and emotions of his own soul'. The egoistic impulse as a motivating force in the poem was further intensified by the frustration of his Irish campaign (February-April, 1812), the flop of *Queen Mab* (1813) and the agonies caused by the crisis in his relationship with Harriet Shelley

(the final breach came in July 1814). Thus driven inward by external circumstances, Shelley does not turn into a pessimist denouncing the world for its hopeless philistinism, nor does he give in to mawkish self-pity.

His introspection provides him with a theme that relates to 'one of the interesting situations of the human mind', namely, nympholeptic love or an inspired search for the ideal love as opposed to human love. Indeed, some of Shelley's letters indicate that he has had intimate visions (during 1811—1815) of nympholeptic tendencies both in himself and in his friend Thomas Hogg.

Shelley's disappointing experience of love for Harriet Grove (whom he depicted to himself as a model of perfection) made him keenly conscious of nympholepsy in himself. He also noticed a similar tendency in Hogg who had fallen in love with Shelley's sister Elizabeth before he even met her and tried vainly to build up through Shelley an ideal relationship of love with her. Shelley's letter (June 2, 1811) throws revealing light on the whole problem and also on the way he looked at it at the moment. Knowing that Hogg's love for his sister is totally fruitless, Shelley warns him under 'the dictates of plain common sense' :

You loved a being, an idea in your own mind which had no real existence. You *concreted this abstract of perfection*, you annexed this fictitious quality to the idea presented by a name, the being whom that name signified was by no means worthy of this.<sup>31</sup>

The Poet in *Alastor*, we know, is the victim of a similar passion for an embodied idea of perfection, and Shelley is able to judge the problem with 'plain common sense'. He warns that only an 'uninformed' Werther would consider his arguments as 'cold reasoning'. He is also aware of the inherent selfishness of a nympholeptic state of mind and points out that it leads to destruction. In the same letter he wants Hogg to see the gap between the image of a perfect woman in the lover's dream and the real woman who does not fit in with the vision :

This truth unless you are determinedly blind, unless you are resolved causelessly and *selfishly to seek destruction* you must see.<sup>32</sup>

Again, referring to his own disappointment with Harriet Grove he writes to Hogg (January 1, 1811) :

Why do you my happy friend tell me of *perfection in love*, is she not gone—and yet I breathe I live—but *adieu to egotism*. I am sick to Death at the name of self. Oh your Theory cost me much reflexion...Is it *self* which you propose to raise to a *state of superiority* by your system of eternal perfectibility in love ?<sup>34</sup>



In a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (November 24, 1811) also Shelley denounces the *selfishness* inherent in the mind of 'frenzy-nourished fools, as once I was'.<sup>35</sup> And yet Shelley involves himself time and again in delusory love, e. g., with Elizabeth Hitchener, Harriet Westbrook (whom he marries and deserts when the delusion passes) and Cornelia Turner—until his elopement with Mary (summer 1814) brings to him—at least for several years<sup>36</sup>—a serene mood of happiness. Their enchanting tour through France, Switzerland and Germany (July—September, 1814)—particularly, the 'magnificent scenes' of Switzerland, and his voyage on the Reuss and the Rhine—made deep impressions which he recorded in the lively descriptions of the voyage in a boat, the stream and other strange places in *Alastor*.<sup>37</sup> The poem, therefore, seems to have been written—as Stovall puts it—in the full tide of his happiness in Mary's love.<sup>38</sup>

What does this happiness imply? Shelley's mood at this stage is not one of complete absorption in self or in an egoistic love of the ideal, which he has noticed both in himself and in Hogg and which he now proposes to examine as an interesting 'psychological' phenomenon'.<sup>39</sup> Stovall's definition of *Alastor* as 'the completest expression of (Shelley's) egoistic impulse'<sup>40</sup> is misleading, because it does not take stock of Shelley's early awareness of the dangers of egoism. The serene mood of happiness allows him to look at the problem from a psychic distance. But even then, Stovall rightly observes, there is in Shelley's mental life a plane of feeling too exalted and too sensitive to be affected by ordinary emotional and intellectual influences, and it is in this plane that the 'vision' dwells and his desire remains 'insatiable'.<sup>41</sup> There is thus a dichotomy in Shelley's attitude to nympholepsy-versus-human love conflict. This duality in his approach to the problem is evident in a letter to Hogg (end of August 1815):

It excites my wonder to consider the perverted energies of the human mind. That so much benevolence and talent as the missionary who travelled with you seemed to possess should be wasted in such profitless endeavours, nor serve to any other end than to expose its possessor to perpetual disappointments. Yet who is there that will not pursue phantoms, spend his choicest hours in hunting after dreams, and wake only to perceive his error and regret that death is no near? One man there is, and he is a cold and calculating man, who knows better than to waste life, but who alas I cannot enjoy it.<sup>42</sup>

The Poet in *Alastor* is like the talented missionary wasting his resources in the wilderness; and so his end is miserable and meaningless. His body which was once 'wondrous' and has now 'no sense, no motion, no divinity'

is lying 'still, dark, and dry, and unremembered'. He seems to meet such a fate primarily because in his pursuit of the vision of perfection he remains blind to human love. The virgins (11.62-63) who 'pined/And wasted for fond love of his wild eyes', the Arab maiden (11.129-139) who 'brought his food,/Her daily portion', and the youthful maidens (11.266-271) who would 'watch, dim through tears, the path/ Of his departure—were 'all potential lovers' whose sympathy and love 'might have brought him the stable happiness which he could never hope to find in dreams'.<sup>43</sup> Thus the Poet's alienation from humanity is complete, and this is suggested even in his namelessness (a man's name implies his link with society). But Shelley is not satisfied with just warning people against such a fate, In his search for the ideal the Poet 'leaps beyond the human bounds', and it is this sublime aspect of the Poet's situation that is more poignantly brought out. A name is a 'mundane' thing, and so the Poet's namelessness is in keeping with 'the rarefied atmosphere'<sup>44</sup> of the poem. There is something Faust-like in the Poet's insatiable thirst for truths as well as in his quest for the unattainable. The voyage in a frail 'shallop' across a perilous ocean through elemental nature symbolizes the soul's voyage through eternity in search of its prototype. The stream is the symbol of individual life :

Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,  
Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulfs,  
Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course  
Have each their type in me.

(11. 505-508)

The Poet gradually reaches the verge of death ('the smooth brink/Of that obscurest chasm') and breathes his last in complete peace :

Hope and despair,  
The torturers, slept ; no mortal pain or fear  
Marred his repose, ... he lay breathing there  
At peace, and faintly smiling :—his last sight  
Was the great moon, ..

(11, 639-641 ; 644-646)

The horned moon that watches the dying Poet and seems to control the 'ebb and flow' of his life stands for ideal love and beauty or for perfection. The fact that the Poet's life has been in complete harmony with this ideal is suggested by the simultaneity of the Poet's death with the setting of the moon :

Now upon the jagged hills  
It rests, and still as the divided frame  
Of the vast meteor sunk, the Poet's blood,

That ever beat in mystic sympathy  
 With nature's ebb and flow, grew feebler still :  
 .....till the minutest ray  
 Was quenched, the pulse yet lingered in his heart.  
 (11. 649-653 ; 657-658)

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Shelley's letter to Robert Southey, March 7, 1816. *Letters of P. B. Shelley* (Vol. I., p. 461), ed. F. L. Jones, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1984.
2. *Ibid*, p. 462.
3. Shelley's Preface.
4. Wordsworth's poem *The Excursion* Bk. I, ll. 504-505—quoted by Shelley at the end of his Preface.
5. Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*.
6. Dennis Walland, Introduction to *Selections from Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.11.
7. Mrs Campbell, *Shelley and the Unromantics*, p.189. London, 1924.
8. Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry : The Fabric of a Vision*, p. 46 Princeton University Press, 1948.
9. Glenn O'Malley, "Shelley's 'Air-prism' : The Synesthetic Scheme of *Alastor*" (1958) in *Shelley : Modern Judgements*, ed. R. B. Woodings (Macmillan, 1968), p.78.
10. *Ibid.*, p 80.
11. Carlos Baker, *op. cit.*, p.55-56.
12. *Ibid*, pp. 58-59.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.
14. Carl Grapo, *The Magic Plant : The Growth of Shelley's Thought*, p. 175. The University of North Carolina Press, 1936.
15. *Ibid*.
16. Shelley was deeply influenced in his early days by the writings of (besides Godwin and Holbach) Rousseau, Locke and Hume, and it took time for him to outgrow the influences of Holbach's materialistic and deterministic philosophy as well as of Locke's and Hume's *tabula rasa* theory of the mind.
17. *The Republic*, Bk X, in *Great Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 417-418, tr. by W.H.D. Rouse. A Mentor Book, 1963.
18. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 176, Duke University Press, 1949.
19. F. L. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 35
20. Neville Rogers, *Shelley at Work : A Critical Inquiry*, p. 33. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1967.
21. Carl Grapo who interprets the Poet's story as a parallel to Shelley's own suggests that the two words refer to his separation from his family. (*op. cit.*) But the Poet has not done anything similar to what Shelley did to alienate his family.
22. Shelley, *Essay on the Literature, the Arts, and the Manners of the Athenians* (written 1818 and published 1840). Italics mine.
23. Carlos Baker raises some objections. First, he rightly notices a contradiction between the two epithets 'self-centred' and 'tender-hearted' applied to the Poet

(*op. cit.* pp. 45-46). But Baker fails to see that the contradiction is due to Shelley's moral indecision. Secondly, Baker totally denies that the poem justifies any 'curse-motif' at work in it as implied in the second paragraph of Shelley's Preface. (*op. cit.*, p. 42). The Ahasuerus episode (briefly alluded to towards the end of the poem) certainly justifies a curse-motif. But a nemesis-motif rather than a curse-motif seems to dominate in the poem.

24. Shelley, *Essay on Love* (written 1815 and published 1840). Italics mine

25. For an extensive analysis of the image, see "Shelley and the Ladder of Love" by Daniel Stempel in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. XV, Winter 1966.

26. The 'two starry eyes' (l. 490) forcing him away from peaceful communion with the nature-spirit belong to the 'veiled maid' or the soul within his soul or epipsyche ('the light that shone within his soul'), set him on his last journey and so further suggest the nemesis-motif.

27. Dennis Welland, *op. cit.*

28. Shelley, *Essay on the Literature, the Arts and the Manners of the Athenians* (1818).

29. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

30. Harold Bloom, "The Quest: *Alastor*" (1961) in *Shelley: Modern Judgements*, p. 89. Mr Bloom actually echoes the views of many other critics—C H. Herford, Stopford A Brooks, Floyd Stovall, Carl Grabo, Neville Rogers, Stephen Spender.

31. T.V. Moore, "P.B. Shelley: an Introduction to the Study of Character". *Psychological Monographs*, XXXI, No. 2 (1922)

32. F. L. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 95. Italics mine.

33. *Ibid.* Italics mine.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 33-34, Italics mine.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

36. In 1820 Shelley met Emilia Viviani and in 1822 Jane Williams, both of whom inspired him and made deep impressions on his mind.

37. His experience of a visit to the source of Thames (summer, 1815) works as a more immediate source of the description of the voyage and the stream.

38. Floyd Stovall, *Desire and Restraint in Shelley*, Book II, Chapter VII entitled "Emergence of the Poet."

39. Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

40. Stovall, *op. cit.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. F. L. Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 429-30.

43. Stovall, *op. cit.*

44. Desmond King-Hele, *Shelley: His Thought and Work*, p. 56. Macmillan, 1962.

# THE RAINBOW BRIDGE : THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP IN *HOWARDS END*

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PRAVINSINH CHAVDA

Forster's major theme—the division and incompatibility of two realities, has more than one level in *Howards End*: the division between individuals, the division between the old and the new, and the division between the body and the spirit. The Breaking up of Old England is his immediate problem, but behind it lies the more urgent and internal problem of the gulf that divides the individuals.

The difficulty of human relationship is due sometimes to torpor and the failure of individuals to bring the total awareness of their minds to respond, some times to the limited interests of people and sometimes to the feebleness of words to express meaning. Consequently, what is said by one never reaches the other; the words echo in the space hollowly, making a meaningless noise. Leonard feels exalted when he talks with Helen about such a serious and great subject as Death, and calling forth all his resources, tries to enjoy the conversation. But when Helen talks about the difference between death and the idea of death, he fails to understand, "Leonard looked at her wondering and had the sense of great things sweeping out of the shrouded night, but he could not receive them, because his heart was still full of little things." (223)\* Henry Wilcox and the Schlegel sisters are looking at the same River Thames, but the man of business is too preoccupied with money and the expansion of his business to understand the river. "The world seemed in his grasp as he listened to the River Thames, which still flowed inland from the sea. So wonderful to the girls, it had no mysteries for him." (124). The river cannot be to Henry what it is to the sisters, for 'we receive only what we give'. Even incidents have far different meanings to different individuals, and receive far different reactions. The accident in which a cat is killed cannot be to Charles what it is to Margaret, and so when his father asks him to relate what has happened, 'he describes what he believes to have happened.' (200) Margaret is conscious of the limitations of language. When they are talking about the strange behaviour of Helen, Margaret calls her 'mad', but when Henry Wilcox, her husband, uses the same words for Helen, 'she is infuriated' ;

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\* All the page numbers refer to the Penguin edition,

'It's madness when I say it, but not when you say it,' because she knows the word implies two entirely different things to them.

Margaret Schlegel is the central character of the novel, and, in her ideas and beliefs, nearer to her creator than any other character. She is a highly intelligent and sensitive woman, involved in the action, and, in fact, at the centre of the maelstrom most of the time; but she is capable of detaching herself and judging the things objectively for herself. She is intensely conscious of the duality, the chasm, and the need to bridge it.

Life is difficult and full of surprises. At all events, I have got as far as that. To be humble and kind, to go straight ahead, to love people rather than pity them, to remember the submerged—well, one can't do all these things at once, worse luck, because they are so contradictory. It is then that proportion comes in—to live by proportion. (70)

This desire for proportion leads her to humility and sympathy, a readiness to consider anything which may be contrary to her ideas and opinions. "How dare the Schlegels despise the Wilcoxes, when it takes all sorts to make a world?" (98). And so she cannot, like Helen, brush aside the Wilcox way of life.

But here's my difficulty. Thus outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one. There's grit in it. It does breed character (27)

Margaret tries to see life steadily and to see it whole. It is thus when we see only parts that truth escapes us. Her problem is to connect all the divisions, to build

the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it, we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have joined into a man; with it love is born.... Only connect. That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die. (174-175)

Leonard who walked through woods and hills for a whole night is fascinating; but when he fails to sustain the same height, Margaret is disappointed as if a dream were lost, and she reminds him: 'You are the man who tried to walk by the pole star.—There should be a connexion between last Sunday and other days. What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives?' (135)

She actually connects her passion with Henry the businessman's prose by marrying him. Like Helen she cannot hate him. 'Don't brood too much,' she writes to Helen, 'on the superiority of the unseen to the seen....our business is not to contrast the two, but to reconcile them.' (98)

Stars and sunrise might not have entered into the daily life of Leonard, but they have entered into the daily life of Helen Schlegel. The two sisters seem like one to Leonard, 'a composite Indian god, whose waving arms and contradictory speeches were the product of a single mind'. (132) But Helen is in many ways different from Margaret: She is younger and furious, while Margaret is mature and patient. Margaret talks dispassionately about the poor, but she can go to the extent of protecting her husband when she discovers that he has ruined Leonard. It is not so with Helen. Only once did the Wilcox way of life attract her and even then her love affair with Paul did not extend beyond a kiss. After that she becomes the arch enemy of the Wilcoxes. In her rage and fury she takes revenge on them by surrendering her body to Leonard. It seems that this is her revenge on Margaret too. When Margaret had declared that she had decided to marry Henry Wilcox, 'Don't, don't Meg, don't', Helen had cried and sobbed. It was as if Margaret had forfeited a sacred pact between the two sisters. The injustice of Henry and the fraud of Margaret infuriate Helen and drive her to the verge of madness. Like a wounded deer or an outcast revolutionary, she wanders all over Europe with Leonard's child within her. An estrangement follows between the two sisters, and it is only when she comes back to take her books that the two sisters are reconciled. The night they pass together is a feast of childhood memories and some rhyme,

Tea, tea, coffee, tea,  
or chocularitee.

After a life with the Wilcoxes, it is a relief for Margaret to be back with Helen, looking forward to a future 'with laughter and cries of children'. The novel ends on a note of hope, with Helen's child playing about. The illegitimate child of Leonard Bast and Helen Schlegel inherits Howards End and the spirit of Ruth Wilcox.

It is ironical that Henry Wilcox the practical businessman should be the husband of a woman who belongs more to the world of the elm-tree and the meadow spotted with dew than to the world of motor-cars and parties. Ruth Wilcox is the fore-runner of Mrs. Moore of *A Passage to India*, a character with something superhuman and celestial about her. From the very beginning Ruth Wilcox seems to have one foot on the earth and the other in the harmonious and peaceful world of death.

Howards End belongs to her and she to Howards End. She moves

about it like a spirit gliding through fog, 'Trail, trail, went her long dress over the sopping grass ..' ..writes Helen, describing her to Margaret. Helen is attracted towards Leonard because he walks over the hills for a whole night. Margaret is attracted towards Ruth Wilcox because there is something elemental in her, something defying culture, and above it.

Clever talk alarmed her and withered her delicate imagining ; it was the social counterpart of a motorcar, all jerks, and she was a wisp of hay, a flower (71)

During their last meeting, Margaret has a kind of premonition of her death, and Ruth Wilcox, being carried up in a lift, seems to her 'a woman of undefinable rarity...going up heavenward, like a specimen in a bottle.'(81)

There is something of her about Margaret which leads old Miss Avery to mistake Margaret for her when she visits Howards End ; and Ruth Wilcox also must have recognised this affinity in the course of their short acquaintance, for she makes Margaret her spiritual heir and bequeaths Howards End to her. Henry Wilcox may not fulfil the last wish of his wife, but then Margaret gets the house and even becomes Mrs. Wilcox by marrying him. In spite of the world of difference between the two women—Margaret is civilisation and reason ; Ruth Wilcox is nature and intuition—there is something common between the two. Ruth Wilcox loves Howards End and Margaret Wikham place—something that was steady, permanent and incapable of change, in the midst of a world which was changing with jolts and explosions.

Ruth Wilcox is more than a character. She is a spirit which lives even after death. To say that she is old England would be to oversimplify matters, because she is a kind of cosmic mind, of which Leonard Bast is a part.

The problem of many characters in the novel is that of rising upward. In the two Schlegel sisters it is a desire for the Infinite ; in Aunt Juley it takes the ridiculous form of desire for achieving social status and acquiring ability to say intelligent things and discuss music ; in Leonard Bast the social ambition is strangely mixed with the desire for the Infinite.

Leonard Bast is something less than a human being in the beginning. In the prosperous world of the Wilcoxes, the Schlegels and the music concerts, he is grotesquely small and insignificant, lying somewhere in the abyss, an infernal character, somebody Virgil might have come across in his journey through the Inferno. He is so insignificant that even his name can be forgotten and changed into Lanoline. He enters the novel only as a fidgeting spectator in a music concert, worried about his umbrella, and it is only in the next chapter, when the author pursues



him through the streets of London and gives him a local habitation and a name that he acquires the status of a character.

From the very outset, inspite of the fuss about the umbrella and the attempts to read Ruskin, there is something tragic about him. Beneath the ridiculous desire to be civilized and to visit music concerts, there is something very much genuine in him, which makes him walk over wolds and downs for a whole night. The distorting mask of culture is thrown away and the real man in him comes out.

Leonard hangs between Jacky and Helen Schlegel, between body and spirit. Jacky with her fleshy body and love of food, always in half-sleep calling him from the other room, symbolizes the infernal world that he lives in and from which he worships Helen like a distant goddess. His aspiration towards Helen is reciprocated by her by her when she discovers in him the man who walked in the dark among the suburban hills for a whole night. This sympathy for him takes a sexual form when she discovers that Henry Wilcox has ruined him. In her rage and fury, she takes revenge over Henry Wilcox and his kind by surrendering to Leonard.

Leonard from that point onward is like a character from Dostoevsky. All that was conscious and artificial is gone, and, torn with repentance, he assumes the sincerity of a martyr. His days and nights are filled with horror :

Most terrible were were his sufferings when he awoke from sleep. Sometimes he was happy at first, but grew conscious of a burden hanging to him and weighing yown his thoughts when they would move. Or little irons scorched his body. Or a sword stabbed him (294)

Purified by remorse, Leonard now unconsciously seeks the only thing which would ideally round off his life with death. We see him wandering from place to place in search of Margaret, like a sleep-walker with half-shut eyes and a smile on his lips. All the disturbance and discordance is gone and a sweet harmony pervades his existence :

Sea of serenity, Sea of Tranquillity, Ocean of the Lunar storms, merged into one lucent drop, itself to slip into the sempiternal dawn. And he had been afraid of the moon (330)

As he walks to his crucifixion, his last moments are pure bliss. 'He was terrified but happy, ashamed, but had done no sin. He knew the confession "Mrs. Wilcox, I have done wrong." 'He is vaguely conscious of what is going to happen, but sure that 'It would be very easy.' Charles need not so much as cut him with the swords : his heart fails and death comes to him silently, like the touch of a feather. He is a part of Mrs. Wilcox's mind and he merges into it.

The novel was published in 1910 and Forster's vision of London is not much different from that of Eliot. It provides more than the background for the story. It is rather a character and emblematic of the lives of the characters at the same time. After the description of Howards End in the first chapter, given by Helen, with its wych-elm, meadow and rabbits, London, with noise and tunnels, provides a contrast. London is the opposite of Howards End, and, if Howards End is the past, London is the present. This is the world into which Henry Wilcox and Jacky exactly fit in, and Ruth Wilcox withers in it. "The fog pressed against the windows like an excluded ghost" (63) To Ruth Wilcox, 'the city seemed satanic, the narrower streets oppresssing like the galleries of a mine.' (80) The heaven into which Margaret sees Ruth Wilcox ascending is 'a vault as of hell, sooty black, from which soots dsscended.' (81)

Every now and then, after pursuing the development of his characters, Forster returns to London :

And month by month the roads smelt more strongly of petrol, and were more difficult to cross, and human beings heard each other speak with great difficulty, breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky. Nature withdrew (102)

London is the essence of the modern civilization, 'intelligent without purpose and excitable without love.'

This is the place where nothing is constant and permanent. A brutal process is going on incessantly, destroying old and erecting new buildings, 'bricks and mortar rising and falling with the restlessness of the water in a fountain, as the city receives more and more men upon her soil.' (45)

London is the finite in which Margaret, Helen and Leonard live and aspire towards the infinite. This is the place from which Leonard might escape one night, and, walking through the woods and hills, have a wonderful vision.

And what is Howards End, the buildings from which the novel derives its title ? It is something which Henry Wilcox or Charles or Dolly do not require, but which Ruth Wilcox cannot live without. It is something in life which far surpasses food and clothes and which begins where the body ends. After the debate, 'Margaret says that money is the warp of the world. Helen asks, 'Then what is the woof ?' (122) The woof is Howards End, something which is beyond money, 'a certain assertion of the wonder of the world.' (117)

## THE THEME OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN E.M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

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S. KRISHNAMOORTHY AITHEL

E.M. Forster makes an exploration of the possibilities and limitations of personal relationships in *A Passage to India*. Though the novel describes the encounter between the British and the Indians at a particular point of time in history, it has a lasting significance. Political domination, the difference in social customs, manners, and outlook create problems for the development of friendship between the two peoples. There are other subtle and insidious cultural difficulties. Belonging to the tradition of liberal humanism, Forster cherishes the hope that tolerance intelligence, kindness and love bridge the differences between people and bring the hearts in union. But it is not in his nature to take things for granted and much as he is fond of these qualities he is not sure they are adequate for relationships. Forster's concern in the novel is to show how far these virtues help in surmounting the barriers that divide the people. The aim is not to glorify the ideals of tolerance and love, but to examine real worth. The method is explorative, an artist's-presenting situations, studying their effects, developing insights, expressing perplexity where the problems are beyond the artist's grasp and discovering his limitations as well as those of the philosophy of personal relationships. He has brought such a depth of interest into the treatment of the subject that the novel has not lost any of its primary significance with the changes in political situation in the land of its action. One could safely disagree with the author's opinion that the India he had written on "no longer exists, either politically or socially. Assuredly the novel dates."<sup>1</sup> "The rocks that rise between them," as Peter Burra observes referring to the separation of Aziz and Fielding, "on their last ride together, the horses that swerve apart—they symbolize Indian differences, it is true, but differences that are not more great, only more particular, than the differences that exist between any two men, between Philip and Gino, Rickie and Stephen, Schlegels and Wilcoxes. Once again, therefore, the author's interest is in the clash of human beings, the struggle any one individual must endure if he is to achieve intimacy with any one other. The fundamental personal difference is again deliberately heightened by an external circumstance—the difference of race."<sup>2</sup> "Great as the problem of India

is," Lionel Trilling remarks, "Forster's book is not about India alone ; it is about all of human life."<sup>3</sup> The paper makes a study of the presentation of the theme of personal relationships and the insight it gives into this great human problem.

Against the background of Anglo-India, Forster presents his drama of personal relationships. Everything is unpropitious. The British rule the country, the Indians are a subject race and the two are divided by every conceivable misunderstanding and prejudice. The whole set-up is hostile—even the soil : "There is something hostile in that soil. It either yields and the foot sinks into a depression, or else it is unexpectedly rigid and sharp, pressing stones or crystals against the tread" (p. 18).<sup>4</sup> Though it is far from a happy environment for friendship and good will, it is an ideal situation to study the problems involved in the creed of personal relationships. Forster's depiction of the British and the Indians is largely governed by his purpose, and suffers from distortions. It has received protests from both the sides. The novel certainly invites such reactions. One way of answering the questions on verisimilitude is to take the position of Lionel Trilling who writes that "These are matters that we can not settle ; that they should have arisen at all is no doubt a fault of the novel."<sup>5</sup> It is also necessary to recognize that such inquiries are not strictly relevant to the novel. It would be unfortunate if the novel which considers a question of universal interest should be treated on the basis of whether or not it represents a people truly.

In the opening chapter of the novel, Forster gives a brief picture of the physical appearance of the the two distinct segments of society of Chandrapore. The part the Indians inhabit is "scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it (the Ganges) deposits so freely" ; its "streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest" ; and everything is "abased" and "monotonous." The description reaches a point where the readers pause to think if the author is not making it hideous beyond a degree where it is possible to believe such a township could exist anywhere on earth not excluding India, as he writes "people are drowned and left rotting..." The section is said to be marked by "swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life" (p. 7). The civil station of the British "on the high ground" makes a contrast. It is "totally a different place." The striking feature is that "it provokes no emotion" and it "charms not, neither does it repel." As such, "it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky" (pp. 8-9). It becomes evident within a short time that this physical isolation of the one from the other is an

outward expression of a basic difference. When Forster talks of the two races here as elsewhere he tends to stress the wide gulf between the two in absolute terms. The manner is, however, validated when it is considered in the light of the larger purpose of the novel though one wonders if the author could not have achieved his goal without yielding to this tendency so completely.

The novel immediately moves on to the deeper aspects of this separation. In Hamidullah's house the Indians have "a very sad talk" "as to whether or not it is possible to be friends with an Englishman" (p. 10).<sup>1</sup> The conversation shows their disappointment with the ruling class. Besides it reveals how this feeling, once it finds room in their hearts, grows among them without justifiable cause into suspicion, distrust and ill will. The conversation at the club gives an idea of the British attitude to the "natives." The Sahibs, especially the Memsahibs, make every effort to avoid them. The ladies are highly amused to hear Adela Quested express her desire to meet the Indians. Forster shows his great skill of caricature in describing these two classes of people and does not exhibit much concern in representing them as they were. He makes the one spiteful and the other petty in order to create a situation of dramatic interest. If the gulf between the Indians and the British is too wide to permit any hope of friendship and love, and if it appears that distrust and misunderstanding are inevitable, it offers a stronger challenge to his philosophy and that is precisely what he wants.

The British and the Indians meet on several occasions. Mrs. Moore chances to meet Aziz in the mosque and they become perfect friends. It is not surprising to find Aziz overcome all his prejudices towards the white people before a lady who thinks his mosque is a sacred place, who believes that God is there and who comes there almost like a pious Moslem. Both Adela and Mrs. Moore make "a great success" (p. 45) in the Bridge Party despite all their difficulties. Fielding believes that the world is "a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture plus intelligence" (p. 62). He finds Indians likable and Aziz and he develop mutual trust and kindness. Aziz loves Fielding very much and he shows the photograph of his dead wife as if admitting him as a brother within the purdah. In spite of his hatred of the Turtons and Burtons, Aziz is responsive to the kindness and good will of these people. They meet and talk as though there are no barriers. Then it should be possible for individuals to develop regard for one another though they are from two countries and cultures. Forster handles the scenes of friendship with supreme confidence. He is, after all, the man who has made many Indian friends and who enjoys their love and

affection as can be seen in the recordings of sweet memories of friendship in *E. M. Forster : A Tribute*.<sup>8</sup>

It is natural that the Western visitors find certain genuine difficulties in developing friendship. Adela and Mrs. Moore have problems of communication with the Indian women at the Bridge Party. Miss Quested's disappointment is described to be very great : "Miss Quested now had her desired opportunity ; friendly Indians were before her, and she tried to make them talk, but she failed, she strove in vain against the echoing walls of their civility." Mrs. Moore is said to be "equally unsuccessful" (p. 43). They hope to know the Indians better by a closer contact and so wish to be Mrs. Bhattacharya's guests. But the visit does not take place and the incident puzzles the ladies very much. Fielding does not like to give it much importance, but Miss Quested would not be satisfied until the matter is cleared up. She dislikes mysteries, Mrs. Moore likes mysteries, but the whole thing appears to her a muddle. Anxious to bring the whole matter to a close, Fielding says "A mystery is only a high-sounding term for a muddle. No advantage in stirring it up in either case. Aziz and I know well that India is a muddle." Adela takes Fielding's indifferent remark seriously and expresses her alarm : "India's—Oh, what an alarming idea!" (p. 69) The disappointments and perplexities of the ladies in the Bridge Party as well as the Bhattacharyas' behaviour do not seem to grow out of the given situations and seem to have been heightened by the author. The scenes fail to create a real sense of failure of understanding and the readers are just left to suppose that there has been a great failure of communications. This is an artistic flaw, but it is redeemed to a great extent by the fact that the author is showing the successful personal relationships when he is talking of these failures.

Though friendships are made, they continue to be shaken by numerous factors. One thing becomes clear after a study of a few of the meetings. The subject of personal relationships is an extremely delicate and complex matter. Mrs. Moore finds a quick response to her love from Aziz, but she does not get the same kind of response from the women at the Bridge Party. Adela is ever anxious to love and show her friendliness, but she feels an increasing sense of disappointment. Aziz and Fielding are not without problems. Aziz feels offended by Fielding's reaction to his question if Adela Quested is a post-Impressionist. He is described to be "sensitive rather than responsive. In every remark he found a meaning, but not always the true meaning, and his life though vivid was largely a dream" (p. 67). Fielding cannot respond to Aziz's emotion and he becomes sad ; "Kindness, kindness and more kindness—yes, that he might supply, but was that really all that queer nation needed ? Did it also not demand an

occasional intoxication of the blood? What had he done to deserve this and what hostage could he give in exchange?" (p. 117) These are only a few of the instances which show the problems entailed in personal relationships. Forster describes many such difficulties in the book with skill and sensitiveness and figures as a man who has lived among people and who knows that the subject of relationships hangs in a delicate balance.

Forster goes into all the possible reasons for success or failure of personal relationships. He is sensitive to the political prejudices, individual differences, peculiarities of temperaments and moods that affect relations. He also perceives that there are many other forces and factors which come into play, he cannot give account of them all, he cannot understand and see clearly, they are incomprehensible as India to Western visitors. He does not, of course, make any direct statement of the unseen power shaping human ends and he actually wants to show the drama of relationships on the social plane. But the readers cannot help recognizing, in the presence of the increasing delicacy and complexity that the subject cannot be discussed in terms of the social context alone. Tolerance, good will, kindness are fine qualities to cultivate and they have made friendships possible. But a reflection on the events shows that they are not adequate, they do not give a complete assurance of achieving the aims of characters. The characters unfortunately do not grow to the awareness of this truth and they cannot go beyond being perplexed and mystified. Forster heavily leans on the plot to convey his vision and this leads him to the vagueness of the Marabar caves. It may be relevant to quote here Lionel Trilling's comment on Forster's characterization though the context in which it is made is different. "To represent the official English as so unremittingly bad and the Indians so unremittingly feeble," writes Trilling, "is to prevent the story from being sufficiently worked out in terms of the characters; the characters, that is, are *in* the events, the events are not in them: we want a larger Englishman than Fielding, a weightier Indian than Aziz."<sup>7</sup> Forster often gives this feeling, as Trilling puts it, that his characters "are *in* the events, the events are not in them" so much so that we have to know the events in order to understand the characters.

As the novel progresses, we see what puzzles the Westerners in the people and country of India in a new light. The expressions of perplexity, called forth by different occasions acquire a significance central to the theme and they cannot be treated as casual statements just arising out of particular situations. Some of these comments may be recalled: "There is something hostile in that soil" (p. 18). "No one can ever begin to think of knowing this country until he has been in it twenty years" (p. 29). "Aziz and I know India is a muddle" (p. 69). "In her ignorance, she

regarded him as 'India', and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India" (p. 72). "But nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else" (p. 86). This uneasiness caused by specific situations in different people is shown gradually growing into a vague and general sense of mystery symbolized in the Marabar caves. It is through the visit to these caves and the consequent separation that the author suggests how unseen forces operate in human relations.

The "extraordinary" Marabar caves increase the sense of mystery or muddle whatever we may choose to call it and they draw everybody's attention. Adela asks Aziz about the caves. Aziz seems to know everything about them, but it comes out from his conversation that he knows nothing about them, he has not visited them himself. It is Professor Godbole's turn to explain. But he forgoes this "great honour" and does not give more than the trivial details. "There is an entrance in the rock," he says with all seriousness, "which you enter and through the entrance is the cave" (p. 75). Forster creates a beautiful situation to create curiosity and a sense of mystery in Adela and Mrs. Moore. This brief mystifying explanation is followed by a perplexing experience of Adela which reinforces how it is necessary to take into account an external element in matters of human relations. She has a ride with Ronny in Nawab Bahadur's car just after declaration to Ronny of her decision that she is not going to marry him. The car skids, no, it runs into an animal, it is "too big for a goat," "it was a buffalo," "unless it was a hyena" and at one point she feels "it was she if anyone who appeared to have attacked the car" (pp. 89-90). Mrs. Moore adds to her perplexity by mentioning that it was "a ghost" (p. 97). The whole scene is marvellously presented. The significance of the incident is that it unites Adela and Ronny and it sets the readers thinking what could have brought them together. "Certainly some external force had impinged .." (p. 89) and the readers join the characters in their guesses and probably find it necessary to go beyond the guesses for a satisfying explanation. The Marabar expedition makes it plain that the theme of personal relationships cannot exclude an outside power.

The critics of *A Passage to India* have been all to a greater or a lesser extent troubled by the incident in the Marabar caves. What are these caves? What did Mrs. Moore hear? What happened to Adela Quested? Questions of this kind are repeatedly asked by critics and answered in a number of ways. K. W. Gransden observes that the question of what happened "can only be answered in a number of ways or perhaps cannot be answered at all." So the whole episode remains shrouded in mystery. The one person who could have disclosed the truth and relieved the readers is



Forster, but he could not be persuaded to let out the secret even to a friendly inquiry of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson.<sup>9</sup> H. J. Oliver comments "One need not even be as certain as was Dickinson that Forster knows the answer himself."<sup>10</sup>

Forster does say a few things which may be of interest. "When I began *A Passage to India*" Forster tells the interviewers of *The Paris Review*, "I knew that something important happened in the Marabar caves, and it would have a central place in the novel—but I didn't know what it would be." Further he informs "The Marabar caves represented an area in which concentration can take place. A cavity....they were something to focus everything up: they were to engender an event like an egg."<sup>11</sup> So he knew that this event was going to be of central importance in the novel. Now the question before us is what it does in the story of personal relations.

A brief study of the commentaries reveals the elusive character of the caves. Frank Kermode says that "they are God without attributes..."<sup>12</sup> For Gertrude White, it is "the very voice of the union which is opposite of divine: the voice of evil and negation."<sup>13</sup> Wilfred Stone looks at them as "something existing before Gods, before differentiation, before value."<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to imagine another instance of such conflicting ideas. There are many more equally opposing interpretations. Virginia Woolf is of the opinion that "it may be, the soul of India."<sup>15</sup> But E. K. Brown reminds us that "The voice of Marabar caves was not the voice of India, only one of the voices..."<sup>16</sup>

The explanations of what happened to Mrs. Moore and Adela in the caves are no less perplexing in their divergence than the elucidations of the symbolic significance of the caves. The common view is that the experience is caused by sunstroke, hysteria or hallucination. Austin Warren thinks that Forster has made it sufficiently clear that "no assault on Adela took place. What happened to Adela and Mrs. Moore was the hysterical experience of the caves, bare, dark, echoing."<sup>17</sup> H. J. Oliver does not agree with Warren's view. He says that "This explanation is carefully left open." He remarks that Forster does not draw any conclusion, nor should we. The cause might equally have been the guide, it might have been "one of that gang of Pathans who might have been drifting through the district. No explanation is ruled out."<sup>18</sup> Harry T. Moore suggests "Was not some native God determined to keep his people and the conquering English apart?"<sup>19</sup>

The Jungian critics have found myths and symbols and archetypal patterns underlying the episode. Wilfred Stone thinks that "the Marabar Hills are far more than one writer's private metaphor." "The mountain and

its hollow core," he writes, "the body and its cavity, or even more generally, the circle within the circle archetypal picturings of life's origin, of the primal inside and outside from which creation springs."<sup>20</sup> He says that the visitors experience "what Jung describes as the Shadow, that deepest and darkest bottom of the unconscious which strikes unspeakable horror into those unequipped to encounter it."<sup>21</sup>

There seems to be a general tendency among critics to isolate the episode from the central theme of the book and read meanings into it. But the event is very much a part of the story of personal relationships. It is, therefore, necessary to see it as something which embodies the author's perception on the theme of relationships. It is the only way of validating one's observations on the subject. The interpretation which does not take into account the contacts the British and the Indians make and the feelings they develop regarding one another from these contacts is beside the point.

It is already pointed out that Forster comes to perceive that mysterious forces come into play in the matter of friendship. He is unable to describe what they are just as his Western characters are unable to understand India and he can communicate only vaguely. He shows a great honesty in presenting it as he sees it. He achieves a paradoxical success and could delude the readers by giving much producible evidence to explain the incident. He keeps them occupied with numerous points of information and makes it difficult for them to determine which of them is significant or if any of them is significant at all. First of all, there are the "extraordinary" caves and their "nothingness" and the "echoes"; then, the heat of April; the low health of Mrs. Moore; the false enthusiasm of Adela Quested; her questions on religion and Aziz's wives; Aziz's attractive features—"beauty, thick hair, a fine skin" (p. 153)—which makes her regret the lack of physical charms in Ronny and herself; the country "which tries to keep men in compartments" (p. 127) and which is "not a promise, only an appeal" (p. 136) and so on. Inside a cave Mrs. Moore feels some "vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad... For an instant she went mad. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo" (p. 147). Climbing over a rock, Adela "somehow" realizes at the sight of footholds similar to "the patterns traced in the dust by the wheels of Nawab Bahadur's car" that "She and Ronny—no, they did not love each other." She clearly sees the "esteemed and animal contact at dusk, but the emotion that links them was absent" (p. 152). She decides not to break off the engagement and cause trouble to others. But she cannot have really made such a compromise with her own conscience, she cannot have stopped con-

fusion from taking hold of her, her charge of assault on Aziz can very well find an explanation in her state of mind. Then there are suggestions of "sunstroke", "hysteria" and "hallucination" among "nightmare" and "vision". The whole episode is written in a language and manner that tricks the readers into thinking that they would find an answer if they pursued one or the other of these hints. The incident symbolizes the author's vague perception of supernatural forces operating in human relations to which he cannot find a name or assign a character. It seems to me pointless to climb the Marabar hills to see if there is something in the caves or to study the steps of Aziz or Adela Quested, not to speak of going to a Brahmin reading the Vedas or of opening texts of Freud or Jung for an explanation.

The Marabar expedition brings about the separation of characters. Mrs. Moore becomes indifferent to everyone including her own children. Adela acts in a very strange manner and she is let down by Ronny and hated by Aziz. The friendship between Aziz and Fielding also does not endure. The attempt, even after clearing up the misunderstandings and a temporary regaining of former relationship, does not succeed. Aziz cannot make friendship with Fielding until "every blasted Englishman" is driven into the sea. The parting is one of memorable scenes of the book :

"Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want."

But the horse didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there" (p.322).

It cannot happen the way Fielding and Aziz want it when the horses, the earth and all the rest of it do not want it. In other words, personal relationships are not just a matter of individual wishes and desires. Two people may bring tolerance, good will and all the noble qualities, but they cannot be sure that they will be able to achieve real friendship. The novel brings out the limitations of human endeavour in a very subtle manner in what seems to be just a story of friendship between two people of different social and cultural prejudices.

Forster shows much less enthusiasm about personal relationships in the book than we would expect from the author of the pamphlet *What I Believe* where he expresses his commitment to friendship in words like "if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my

friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."<sup>22</sup> There are several references in the book which question the very importance of personal relationships. Though we cannot identify the views of the characters in the book with the author's personal view, it is clear that they come from a man who does not think that everything is well with personal relationships. Mrs. Moore "felt increasingly (vision or nightmare?) that, though people are important, the relations between them are not" (p. 135). Adela feels the need to revise the whole idea of personal relationships. "What is the use of personal relationships," she reflects, "when everyone brings less and less to them? I feel we ought all to go back into the desert for centuries and get good. I want to begin at the very beginning. All the things I thought I learnt are just a hindrance, they are not knowledge at all, I'm not fit for personal relations" (p. 197). As she thinks of death, she becomes aware of the temporary nature of the relations. "But it has made me remember," she tells Fielding, that we must all die: all these personal relations we try to live by are temporary." Both Adela and Fielding feel terribly dissatisfied with life "at the height of their powers—sensible, honest even subtle." The author's comment on how they appeared at the height of their powers is revealing: "A friendliness, as of a dwarfs shaking hands, was in the air" (p. 264). Fielding has begun to feel that he ought to have been thinking about something else in his life: "he felt dubious and discontented suddenly, and wondered whether he was really and truly successful as a human being. After forty year's experience he had learnt to manage his life and make the best of it on advanced European lines, had developed his personality, explored his limitations, controlled his passions—and he had done it all without becoming either pedantic or wordly. A creditable achievement, but as the moment passed, he felt he ought to have been working at something else the whole time he didn't know what, never would know, never could know, and that was why he felt sad" (p. 191). The belief in personal relations and the effort to achieve them brings sorrow and disappointment to the characters. It is no less a saddening experience to the author and the novel becomes all the more poignant in its appeal by his involvement with the fate of his characters. But he is a greater man than them and could look at what is happening with some detachment. He does not let the sadness grow into pessimism. He can see that there is something wrong in his approach and the awareness of the flaw makes the defeat endurable.

The novel brings out certain serious limitations of personal relations. Their shortcomings originate from people's inability to respond to what may be called the irrational aspect of friendship. The Western characters

try to work out everything in a logical and scientific way. But they cannot go very far with such an attitude particularly in the matter of friendship. The Indians, as Forster sees them, are not governed by logic or reason in their feelings for others. They are shown to achieve by disregarding intellect and common sense a depth of love unattainable by Adela or Fielding. "Mr. Fielding, no one can ever realize," says Aziz to Fielding's uneasiness, "how much kindness we Indians need, we do not even realize it ourselves. But we know when it has been given. We do not forget though we may seem to. Kindness, more kindness, and even after that more kindness. I assure you it is the only hope (p. 117). When Aziz loves, he loves with an intensity which has no parallel among his Western friends excepting Mrs. Moore. Mrs. Moore and Fielding "had strange and beautiful effects on him—they were his friends, his forever; he loved them so much that giving and receiving became one. He loved them even better than the Hamidullahs because he had surmounted obstacles to meet them, and this stimulates a generous mind. Their images remained somewhere in his soul upto his dying day, permanent additions" (p. 143). "Is emotion a sack of potatoes," he retorts to Fielding's remark that there is no proportion and commonsense in his emotions, "so much the pound, to be measured out? Am I a machine?.. If you are right, there is no point in any friendship; it all comes down to give and take, or give and return, which is disgusting, and we had better all leap over the parapet and kill ourselves" (p. 254). "Your mother was," Aziz tells Ralph Moore, "my best friend in all the world." He feels puzzled how he has this regard for her. "What did this eternal goodness of Mrs. Moore," he questions to himself, "amount to? To nothing, if brought to the test of thought. She had not borne witness in his favour, nor visited him in the prison, yet she has stolen to the depths of his heart, and he always adored her" (p. 312). Forster is not, however, saying that Aziz is a model. In fact, he maintains a critical attitude towards him throughout. But he does not dismiss him as sentimental. Aziz plays a significant role of conveying Forster's disappointment with people like Fielding and Adela Quested.

Even Mrs. Moore's love which extends to the wasps, creatures excluded from divine hospitality by Mr. Graysford and Mr. Sorley, seems limited compared to the Hindu love that invests divinity on an animal like the monkey and has temples to worship him: "God so loved the world that he took monkey's flesh upon him" (p. 321). Forster's description of the celebration of Sri Krishna's birthday, throws some new light on the concept of love and personal relations. The following passage contains his discovery;

This was more exciting, the inner images it evoked more definite, and the singers' expressions became fatuous and languid. They loved all men, the whole universe, the scraps of their past, tiny splinters of detail, emerged for a moment to melt into the universal warmth. Thus Professor Godbole, though she was not important to him, remembered an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days. Chance brought her to his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throngs of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness and not reconstruction. His sense grew thinner, he remembered a wasp seen he forgot where, perhaps on a stone. He loved the wasp equally, he impelled it likewise, he was imitating God. And the stone where the wasp clung—could he...no, he could not, he had been wrong to attempt the stone, logic and conscious effort had seduced, he came back to the strip of red carpet...(p. 286).

Professor Godbole makes no conscious effort to extend his love to Mrs. Moore and the wasp. He is actually absorbed in his songs and is possessed by the love of God. He is lifted above his self for a moment to the vision of God's love for Mrs. Moore and the wasp and immediately he gives his heart to them who have been so honoured by God. They are not just the woman or the insect he saw the other day, they are special beings who live in God's love and so they are important to him. One must probably be able to see in the person with whom he is seeking relationship that the person is important to him in some such way, he must be more than what he is, the friendship must have a sanction from what he believes the enduring reality.

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# THE MULTIPLE EXISTENCE OF PEARL IN *THE SCARLET LETTER*

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BIBHU PRASAD PADHI

## I

Critics of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* have almost ignored a brilliant character like Pearl. She has been described as "often tedious and sometimes preposterous"<sup>1</sup>; the portrayal of her character has been said to betray "Hawthorne at his most barren."<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this paper is to show her great importance in the novel. She is, in fact, the only character in the novel who *flows*; her dynamism of character is of a unique kind. It is not, therefore, surprising that Henry James in his biography of Hawthorne, describes her in such words as "brilliant", "graceful", and "admirable."<sup>3</sup> She is the only character in the novel who lives and acts beyond the manners and habits of a rigidly theological society, and beyond the limits of sin and punishment. She is a flower, "a lovely and immortal flower" that is born out of "the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion."<sup>4</sup>

Pearl is more than a human being. She is a symbol, "the reality of sin" (p. 367) and that is the one reason why Hester is so possessive about her; she is "Her Pearl." She is "both her torture and happiness, her blessing and retribution."<sup>5</sup> Hester has purchased her with all she had—"her mother's only treasure" (p. 377). "Strange, indeed," Hawthorne would say and we would agree with him. She is the emblem of sin, like the red letter on her mother's posom. She is also the result of sin, like the mysterious red spot on the minister's heart. However, she is not herself a moral agent.<sup>6</sup> To Hyatt Watt Waggoner she does not seem to exist on the moral plane at all: "She is an object of natural beauty, a flower, a gem."<sup>7</sup>

## II

Pearl represents both a continuity and a contrast. Throughout the novel, Hawthorne constantly associates her with the scarlet letter and thereafter she strikes a relationship with Man and his Fall. The novelist himself says that she was to "connect her parents for ever with the race and descent of mortals" (p. 377). This is also suggested by the letter "A".



Being the first letter of the alphabet, it brings to one's mind the very idea of Original Sin. Hester looked "into the child's expanding nature, ever dreading to detect some dark and wild peculiarity, that should *correspond* with the guiltiness to which she owed her being" (p. 377, *italics mine*).<sup>8</sup>

Pearl comes as a contrast too. She is a contrast both to her mother's nature and to the Puritanic world at large. To Hester, Pearl's nature appeared to possess depth and variety, but it "lacked reference and adaptation to the world into which she was born" (p. 378). "She was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the world's first parents were driven out" (p. 377). By associating her with the Garden of Eden, Hawthorne lifts the character of Pearl from the world of rigid Puritanic laws and values to a world where laws and values need not matter; in other words, from a theological to an ideal world. This is implied in Hawthorne's description of her "infinite variety": "in this one child there were many children, comprehending the full scope between the wild-flower prettiness of a peasant-baby, and the pomp, in little, of an infant princess" (p. 378). In her person the contradictions of love and sin have been resolved. She, in a way, defies the world in which she lives. She is an "outsider" whom the world cannot include; it can neither throw her off since it has not found a means of negating her angelic mysteriousness. She is a little too much for this world, and after finding it to be guided thoroughly by the institutions and their rules, continually retires into a wilderness where she gets full scope for her angelic-spiritual activities. She represents the very opposite of tradition, of pattern, of orthodoxy, of set terms of belief. She is a representative, and an honest representative at that, of a world which remains an ideal for Hawthorne and which is the final answer to his own experiences of religious doubt.

It has been said earlier that Pearl's role in the novel is symbolic. Again, many of the dominant symbols in the novel are given to us in and through the character of Pearl. On seeing the rose-bush at the Governor's garden, she cries for a red rose. She decorates her hair fantastically with the wild flowers of the forest, looking "strangely beautiful" (p. 491). "She gathers sea-weeds of various kinds and makes for herself a head-dress, a scarf, or a mantle and assumes "the aspect of a little mermaid" (p. 463). She takes some eel-grass and imitates on her own bosom the decoration on her mother's—the letter "A"—"but freshly green instead of scarlet" (p. 463). The greenness of the woodland grandeur with its suggestion of health and life is continually manipulated against the "blood-smell"<sup>9</sup> of the "scarlet," with

its pathetic, almost obsessive suggestion of the Fall, and the "scarlet woman", of the Old Testament and much of the medieval literature. We have Pearl standing beside the brook, "with all the picturesqueness of her beauty, in its adornment of flowers and wreathed foliage" (p. 492). She is being constantly associated with flowers, fruits and everything related to fruition and fulfilment, as Chillingworth with weeds, darkness and infernal fires, in fact everything suggesting decay and degeneration.<sup>10</sup> This is quite evident in the language that Hawthorne has given her. Looking at the murmuring brook she cries, "Why art thou so sad? Pluck up a spirit." (p. 472, italics mine). She resembles the brook "inasmuch as the current of her life gushed from a well-spring as mysterious" (p. 472), and like the brook she has *flowed*, in the course of her lifetime, through the bushes. She is something like a flower in her strange simplicity, her innocence and her delicacy. She has the "naturalness" and the strange beauty of the rose and like the rose, she is herself a symbol of love-promise.<sup>11</sup> Pearl is the language of Hawthorne the poet; there is something ancient about her, something which can be called *preconscious*, and therefore the *tentative* nature of the language is justified.

Pearl is raised to the spiritual world through her association with flowers. She is perfectly reflected on the surface of the brook with her adornment of flowers, but "more refined and spiritualized than the reality" (p. 492). She has about her the thinness and the airy quality so much peculiar to the spirits, and remains most of the time "in a state of preternatural activity" (p. 383). Her look, so very inexplicable on Hester's part and which is accompanied by a "wild flow of spirits" (p. 380), makes her mother question "whether Pearl were a human child. She seemed rather an airy sprite" (p. 380). Pearl pursues the children of the Puritans and in her fierce pursuit she resembles "some half-fledged angel of judgement—whose mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation" (p. 390). There is a strange "remoteness and intangibility" (p. 380) about her. Her reflected image on the pool seems to communicate to her something of "its own shadowy and intangible quality (p. 492). She seems to be "hovering in the air and might vanish, like a glimmering light that comes we know not whence, and goes we know not whither (p. 380). She perhaps brings to Hester that Light from Heaven she desperately longs for: "The spell of life went forth from her ever creative spirit and communicated itself to a thousand objects, as a torch kindles a flame wherever it may be applied". (p. 383). She is like the original creator, the artist worthy to be imitated and her creative spirit is emphasized again and again.

For the Governor she is an apparition; for the neighbours she is a "demon offspring" (p. 387); for Mr Wilson is a "little bird of scarlet plumage" (p. 396); inside the forest she becomes a "nymphchild", an "infant-dryad", or "whatever else was in closest sympathy with the *antique* wood" (p. 490, italics mine). Mr Wilson has seen such figures when the sun, shining through a richly painted window, traces out the golden and crimson images upon the floor. She is as natural as sunlight and therefore can reach the sunlight in the forest when Hester cannot. To her mother she seems to have grasped and absorbed some of it and would give out some of it when they enter into a darker shade. This phosphorescent quality in Pearl is always kept close to the divine halo shining around her, to give her the stature of an Oriental God. Hawthorne speaks of "an absolute circle of radiance around her (p. 378). She possesses that light variously spoken of as the divine light, the light of love and fulfilment—the same light that reveals the hidden dark caverns of the human mind and heart.

### III

Mr Wilson doubts Pearl's Christian origin. 'Art thou a Christian child?' he asks, 'Or art thou one of those naughty elfs or fairies, whom we thought to have left behind us, with other relics of Papistry, in merry old England (p. 397)? Pearl gets her name from the "pearl of great price" in St. Matthew, which suggests "the incomparable value of the hope of heaven (p. 398).<sup>12</sup> Hawthorne constantly refers to the Christian myths. Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne are compared to Adam and Eve respectively; they are spoken of as "fallen leaves." Roger Chillingworth is the laughing Satan. Pearl, however, is different from all of them. Chillingworth's inherent power in *reading* the human heart, for instance, is put against the light possessed by Pearl which *reveals* the human soul; whereas the physician's method has something deliberate about it, Pearl's recognition of facts is instantaneous, not to say intuitional. The forest offers her partridge-berries looking "red as drops of blood upon the withered leaves" (p. 488), and we at once remember Christ's blood saving the sinful world. But these berries Pearl gathers and is pleased with their "wild flavour." Hawthorne, through a careful handling of the symbols, makes Pearl a mixed character, someone who combines in her person the soft Christian and the wild pagan elements. Her very existence is a pointer to this fact. She is the product of a sin which can be atoned for through suffering and isolation within the limits of Christianity, but she herself has wild and sprightly habits which defy, at times, the very limits of Christian superstition. Mr Wilson doubts her Christian origin knowing fully well that she is born and brought up in a

society which is strictly governed by Christian laws. "It was as if she had been made out of new elements, and must perforce be permitted to live her own life, and be a law unto herself .." (p. 421).

Richard Chase in his book *The American Novel and Its Tradition* has said, "Consciously or not, Hawthorne was writing a kind of mythic prophecy about the great cultural change involved in the old world to the New. Hawthorne .. was depicting in Chillingworth and the younger Hester the decline of a richly emotional, patriarchal, aristocratic way of life and the emergence in Dimmesdale and the 'social service' Hester, of a new puritan-democratic consciousness, symbolised in little Pearl who is mild and gentle on the surface but wild and demonic underneath."<sup>13</sup> This new consciousness has something to do with the mixture of Christian and pagan qualities spoken of earlier, and which comes as a challenge to everything that is strictly Puritan and intellectual. It shows a possibility of communication and love between sensitive human beings in a world of totalitarian Puritanism, with all its "dismal severity" (p. 342). Pearl is the perfect fictional embodiment of the freed democratic spirit that emphasized the essentially human, the changing and the fresh, and which was recently being experienced by the New England of Hawthorne's day.

In his account of Pearl, Hawthorne has stressed those factors that made her a moody child and went against any establishment of principles. Her "elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder; or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered" (p. 371). Chillingworth remarks: "There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human ordinances and opinions, right or wrong, mixed up with that child's composition" (p. 420). Pearl has nothing to inherit from the Puritan society; her character consists of qualities latent in nature. Notwithstanding the fact that she is born of Puritan parents, she seems to laugh at their world. She is the projection, in visual terms, of the poetic faculty of Hawthorne's mind, ready to act against anything that is conscious, deliberate and rational. Like the letter "A", Pearl "transcended analytic thought," and became the embodiment of an elusive, "rationally indefinable quality."<sup>14</sup>

Mr Charles Fiedelson in *Symbolism and American Literature*, has suggested (after quoting Hawthorne himself) that, the underlying purpose in all of Hawthorne's novels was always to "open an intercourse with the world."<sup>15</sup> In a way, Pearl becomes for the novelist the *instrument* that helps him to found the New World. She also becomes the perfect *representative* of the New World—a world of fresh air, of flowers and

ripened fruits, and above all, a world in which sensations and feelings matter a lot.

## IV

Henry James has diagnosed "a want of reality"<sup>16</sup> in the characters of Hawthorne. It must be admitted that Hawthorne is a little ambiguous in the depiction of Pearl's character, but it is not his fault. It ought to be ambiguous since her position in the novel is itself ambiguous: it is in her that the Old and the New merge, and this gives her character an uncertain twilight quality which is so often mistaken for a lack of solid hold upon reality.<sup>17</sup> She is there to shed the last tears upon her father's cheek, the most important character in the final scene of grief, one who answers Dimmesdale's final question with nothing less than a kiss: "Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken" (p. 539, italics mine).

## REFERENCES

1. Robert E. Spiller & others, (ed.), *Literary History of the United States* (New York & London, 1946), p. 429.
2. F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York, 1941; Delhi, 1973), p. 278.
3. Found in *Shock of Recognition*, edited by Edmund Wilson (New York, 1955), p. 511.

4. However, it should be noted that even as a flower, she does not have completely independent existence: the flower was the result of passion and has its ultimate meaning in terms of that passion. Its "loveliness" is justified by the "luxuriance" of a particular kind of passion. The flower that Pearl is, is *lovely*, as the first encounter of Adam and Eve was *lovely*; and it is as "immortal" as the story of Adam and Eve in the history of mankind.

Hereafter I shall not give the page numbers of the quotations from the text in a separate footnote, but mention them at the end of the quotations. Throughout my paper I shall use the edition of Hawthorne's Works published by Chatto and Windus under the editorship of Malcolm Cowley.

5. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. 278.
6. By saying this I do not deny the fact that Pearl is responsible, to a certain extent, for the kind of action that Hester and Dimmesdale take after her birth. In fact, Hester regains the sympathy of the community through her firm devotion to her child. She remains, in a way, the very embodiment of memory, what Spiller & others call "the presentness of the past" (*Literary History*) and therefore something which is physically present for Hester and the Minister. She is also the instrument through which the purgation of Hester and Dimmesdale is achieved. She is there so that "the torture of her Hester's daily shame would at length purge her soul... (p. 369)". I would like to refer to one more passage in the novel: "In the nature of the child seemed to be perpetuated those unquiet elements that had distracted Hester Prynne

before Pearl's birth, but had since begun to be soothed away by the softening influences of maternity (p. 382)." Hester thinks that Pearl is "endowed with a million-fold the power of retribution" for her sin (p. 400).

7. Essay on *The Scarlet Letter* in *Interpretations of American Literature*, ed. Charles Feidelson, Jr. and Paul Brodtkorb, Jr (New York, 1959), p. 26. However, Waggoner is mistaken when she is speaking about "the drastic simplification of life Hawthorne has here indulged in, in giving Pearl existence *only* on the natural plane" (italics mine)"

8. However, the discovery of such a "connection" remains only a possibility for Hester, though it is quite there for all those characters who are not directly involved in the story.

9. I have borrowed the word from Collin Wilson's *The Outsider*.

10. In terms of symbolism, Pearl and Chillingworth stand at extremes. Whereas Chillingworth is "like a miner searching for gold: or, rather, like a sexton delving into a grave" (p. 416), Pearl is continually crossing those frontiers of experience which are so close to the supernatural. She is an "elf", a "sprite", an "apparition", and has an existence which is as indeterminate as theirs. She is a "mermaid"; she has the quality of phosphorescence; she lives most of the time in the space between Earth and Heaven; and finally, is a first cousin to forests, streams and flowers. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that she has qualities of all the four natural elements: water, fire, air and earth.

11. Waggoner, *Interpretations*, p. 15.

12. Ibid, p. 19-20.

13. Richard Chase, "Hawthorne and the limits of Romance" in *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. (New York, 1957), p. 76

14. Charles Feidelson, Jr, *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago and London, 1953), p. 14.

15. Ibid, p. 9.

16. *The Shock of Recognition*, p. 513

17. Matthiessen and after him Charles Feidelson, Jr, have spoken of Hawthorne's conception of a new kind of "romance". Hawthorne tried to create "a realm midway between private thought and the objective world" (Feidelson, *Symbolism*, p. 7), a world somewhere between the real world and the fairy-world, and Pearl is the typical representative of this world of romance. The natural result of working in such a transitional world, Feidelson points out, was Hawthorne's allegorical method; and remaining a true allegorist, Hawthorne avails himself of a formal correspondence between "ideas" and "things". Pearl moves to and fro between her existence as an idea and her existence as a thing, and by disallowing her to bear any formal definition Hawthorne gives her an all-inclusive quality which Dimmesdale, Hester or Chillingworth lack. They are the people who have already taken the decision to go against the real world—Hester and Dimmesdale by a strange isolation and Chillingworth by rejecting moral sympathies—but are not ready enough to grasp the nature of the other world. The problem of identity which confronts them, the sense of a loss of belonging does not bother Pearl. She "Transmutes everyday objects" like the celestial letter "A" shining above all the characters in the story. Pearl is in *this* world, but smoothly moves on to the *other* world, and even there, is prepared to "open an intercourse with the world" and the natural result of this is a symbolic method. In *The Scarlet Letter* there is the use of a double method corresponding to

the "double vision" which Hawthorne wants to offer : the allegoric I and the symbolistic.

I cannot agree with what Spiller and others say in the following passage (*Literary History*, p. 429) :

Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale leave little to be desired ; they are complete. The two other major characters, Roger Chillingworth Pearl, lack finish—The truth is that in neither of these did Hawthorne's love of the character itself transcend his interest in the abstract moral state symbolized.

And I do not understand what they mean when they say that Hester and Dimmesdale "complete." Pearl, I think, is all the better for not being "complete" by their standards. If they really mean that they "leave little to be desired," I agree with them, since Pearl leaves a lot to be desired and therefore keeps up our interest and suspense.

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